Queerly Disrupting Methodology
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Beginning

Dichotomous thinking infuses numerous research methodologies, limiting what is allowed to exist. These ways of thinking and being negate queer existences because those who identify as queer live beyond the binaries of sex, gender and sexuality. Thus, queer methodologies are vital for exposing hegemonic linear ways of being and thinking that analyze, categorize and psychiatrize those outside of such polarized identities. My goal is not to delimit what a queer methodology is, but rather to add to the discussion regarding ontology and epistemology and how this may shift our gaze in a queer research inquiry. I argue queer methodologies provide space for the multiplicity of strangeness to exist as their disruption of normalcy and Otherness (Kumashiro 1999) is explicitly political. Queer methodologies deconstruct truth claims, question dualistic ontology and queer straight lines.

Though my approach is from a queer theory and poststructural perspective, I note Namaste (2003) critiques these theories for their lack of contextuality and demands researchers to be reflexive. But if I discuss my own identity within this paper, will I be reproducing my own oppression in taking up reverse discourses, which reconstitute dominant discourses about the Other from a subjugated position? If I declare myself genderless and sexless, and thus immune to these categorizations, I ignore how sexism, transphobia, heterosexism and misogyny have forever changed my life and my body. If I locate myself solely within theoretical frameworks of poststructural feminism and queer and gender theory, will this simply reflect only my thinking and not my physical being? As methods are to methodology, so is my body connected to my subjectivity.

Would it suffice to say I am genderqueer? Likely not. What is not read in this declaration is my race, class, age, ability (or are they read as dominant in each of these categories?), nor is my sex or sexuality intact. I have experienced life as a female bodied, white, middle class, queer femme from English-speaking Canada. These identities written upon me shape how I experience and understand the world: "we embody the discourses that exist in our culture, our very being is constituted by them, they are a part of us, and thus we cannot simply throw them off" (Sullivan 2003: 41). What is not so clear is how I transgress heterosexual gender norms and that I have also experienced the physical consequences of patriarchy, heterosexism and homonormativity through incest, surviving a late diagnosis of cervical dysplasia and domestic violence. There are few spaces I exist in where I can definitively mark which category I fit. Binary systems within sex, gender and sexuality are problematic for me not only personally, but also politically and ideologically. Although I have been an activist for more of my life than not, critical race, queer and gender theories have given me language and ideas to examine the ways in which I am in the world in my inconsistent, ever shifting and multiple ways.

Queering

In this paper, I use the term "queer" in a multitude of ways. As a noun, I use it to reference people who identify as queer – typically people who challenge and/or exist beyond dualistic and constructed categories such as transgender, bisexual, two-spirit, transsexual, transvestite, intersex

and questioning people (Manning, forthcoming). To use queer as an identity can run counter to the work queer does to circumvent and undermine identity politics. Here, however, I use it to highlight how it has been taken up as a liminal identity in ways that problematize orientation. By this I mean that sex, gender and sexuality are relational and queer positions itself against normative spaces made visible by dominant discourses.

Additionally, I use queer as a verb. To queer something is to question normalcy by problematize its apparent neutrality and objectivity. Britzman (1998: 82) locates what queer theory can do as a practice: "Queer theory is not an affirmation, but an implication. Its bothersome and unapologetic imperatives are explicitly transgressive, perverse, and political". Queer resists definition, uniformity and cohesion. It examines how normal is made specifically with regards to sexuality.

Heteronormativity took root in queer theory as it made explicit how heterosexuality positions itself as neutral, normative and dominant. Similarly, the "new homonormativity" is a set of "politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them" (Duggan 2003: 50). Duggan explains how these neo-liberal views get taken up by gay men and lesbians as a way to normalize their existences. I argue drawing these lines of normalcy is done at the expense of queer, trans and intersex people and reconstitutes us as invisible and deviant. In response, I take up queer in multiple ways to expand on its relationality, disruptions to normativity and intrinsic deviance.

> Although the violation of compulsory sex/gender relations is one of the topics most frequently addressed within queer theory, this body of knowledge rarely considers the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for people who have defied it, who live outside it, or who have been killed because of it. (Namaste 2003: 9)

Transgenderists, feminists, and some queer theorists (Fausto-Sterling 1997; Stryker 2006; Wilchins 2004), push queer theory beyond simply examining the discursive production of sexuality. Where queer theory primarily disrupts the seemingly stable categories of homosexual and heterosexual, gender and transgender theories take this disruption further by problematizing how sex and gender are socially constructed and required. Gender and transgender theories also tease out neo-liberal agendas embedded in the hegemonic lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) movement. These theories offer ways to not only make visible and centre intersex, transsexual, transgender, two-spirit, pansexual and queer people within discourses where we have often been objects, but critique the "natural" construction of sex much touted by science.

Disturbing Ontology
Modernist ontology permeates multiple research methodologies. "An ontology is a theory about what the world is like – *what the world consists of*, and why" (italics added, Strega 2005: 201). Modernist ontology inscribes binary constructs in a way that maintains sexual and gender dominance. When researchers fail to question the dualistic nature inherent in certain methodologies, these social, physical and political hierarchies are perpetuated. Methodologies located in positivist paradigms are marked by dichotomous ways of being and thinking, yet some interpretative and emancipatory methodologies are also influenced by this ontology. Conversely,

ontologies that embrace complexity, multiplicity and inconsistency are more likely to be useful in producing queer methodologies. Queer methodologies need a "continuous questioning and deconstruction of all knowledge," particularly knowledges claiming objectivity and truth (Hammers & Brown 2004: 88).

During the 'Age of Reason,' modernist practice produced and classified knowledge (Hall & Gieben 1992: 8). "Deeply embedded in these [modernist] constructs are systems of classification and representation, which lend themselves easily to binary oppositions, dualisms, and hierarchical orderings of the world" (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 55). These binary constructs are not limited to sex and sexuality, but also significantly frame constructions of race, ability, etc. Somerville (2000) describes how race and sexuality were classified and enmeshed to construct deviant, knowable and subordinate objects. Wittig (1980: 210) points out, "this necessity of the different/other is an ontological one for the whole conglomerate of sciences and disciplines" she calls the "straight mind".

Positivist scientists view these classifications as objective, neutral and true suggesting they are removed from all social, cultural and political influences. Numerous theorists (Fausto-Sterling 1997 & 2000; Foucault 1990; Hammers & Brown 2004; Tuhiwai Smith 1999) critique science for its claims of objectivity, which produce "patriarchal knowledge and work against knowledge of the realities of gender relations" (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 49). Adrienne Rich (1987, cited in Hammers & Brown 2004: 85) argues, "objectivity is a term given to men's subjectivity". To work against objectivity and to position subjectivity in research is necessary in queer methodologies. Although I do not want to position subjectivity as the opposing binary mate to objectivity (as this would be contradictory to my claims of rejecting binaries), I propose to problematize subjectivity by exposing the complexity and contradictions within one's own subjectivity.

In interpretative and emancipatory research paradigms, a researcher can reproduce dominant modernist representations by restricting their own complexity to a binary identification as an insider or outsider. Several feminist theorists complicate the insider/outsider quandary by blurring or queering the line between these dichotomies. Fine (1998: 135) 'works the hyphen' between Self and Other and suggests "researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations". Tang (2006: 14) explores occupying insider and outsider roles by "oscillating" between each role, "signifying both being hesitant or embracing of the roles participants might have allocated for me…[having] the agency to switch in between roles if necessary or to remain straddling in ambiguity". Lal (1996: 196) questions the politics of self in proposing, "with each threshold of an insider boundary that one crosses, there would seem to be another border zone available for one's definition as outsider". In these ways, subjectivity can and should become murky, unstable and contradictory by resisting a clear and contained identification within the insider/outsider polarity.

Hammers & Brown (2004: 87) point out, " 'situating' of oneself…would not only re-organize the researcher(subject) - researched(object) relationship to be one that is non-hierarchical, equitable, and respectful, but make as central direct, material experience and reality". Although identifying one's subjectivity does not entirely level the power dynamics within research, I agree

it is necessary to resist claims of objectivity while helping to identify power relations at work within a research project. Subjectivity also allows for multiplicity and complexity to *be* within the research – something that objectivity would clearly reject. Subjectivity and reflexivity within research is well grounded in feminist and emancipatory research approaches. What I hope to promote is a kind of subjectivity that complicates, questions and deconstructs power relations, discourses and working assumptions within queer methodologies.

I see value in claiming space for queer subjectivities so those objectified by science can tell our own stories and lay claim to knowledges previously made deviant and invisible. However, my specific interest is to expose the techniques/technologies of making normal. I am particularly interested in queer methodologies that examine how those who study non-normative sexes, genders and sexualities discursively produce us. My unapologetic and purposeful mission is to poke holes in, deconstruct and destabilize the hegemonic understandings that have classified, ignored, persecuted and killed us. For me, my politics of resistance is deeply rooted in my subjectivity. My subjectivity positions my ontological perspective to incorporate queer, two-spirit, trans, intersex and non-normative sexed, gendered and sexual people within the world.

Because of its multiplicity, complications and contradictions, a queer ontology challenges modernist ideas of binary, stable categories. As ontology shapes what existences are made possible and visible, a queer methodology reveals and makes possible queer and trans lives, experiences and encounters. A queer methodology therefore has a distinct ontology and epistemology. Although queer remains elusive, contextual and unstable and should continue to resist solidification, a queer methodology is most incongruent with research paradigms rooted in a dichotomous way of thinking and being, epitomized in classical sciences such as biology, psychiatry and medicine.

My own view of the critique of science is significantly informed by feminist, anti-racist (feminist), anti-colonial and poststructural analyses and their well established critiques of the effects of science's discursive productions and material tyranny. "Feminists have struggled to expose scientific knowledge produced by particular male selves in particular social locations" (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 37). Terry (1995: 155) suggests, "biological arguments about race had long been seen as the handmaidens of racism, just as those about gender were identified to be a central part of the architecture of sexism". How well oppression works is based largely on the interlocking configurations of oppressions. Somerville (2000: 17) examines how contingent the making of race and homosexuality are:

> My aim is not to replace a focus on gender with that of race but rather to understand how discourses of race and gender buttressed one another, often competing, often overlapping, in shaping emerging models of homosexuality, I suggest that the structures and methodologies that drove dominant ideologies of race also fueled the pursuit of knowledge about the homosexual body: both sympathetic and hostile accounts of homosexuality were steeped in assumptions that had driven previous scientific studies of race.

Foucault traced the discursive production of sexuality through science in the *History of Sexuality, Vol. I* and argued the "domain of sexuality has been increasingly constructed in terms of

scientific knowledge, which he terms 'scientia sexualis.' Sexual science has been concerned with classifying, analyzing and examining sex in minute detail… [and] constitutes sex as a problem of truth" (O'Brien 1999: 131).   Although science has been highly critiqued, newer or rather reconstituted, forms of positivist thought are also being questioned as to their utility for disruptive queer agendas.

Touted as a non-ideological, pragmatic tool, evidence-based research could arguably be considered reverse discourse in its updated, sleek and highly consumable model. Grundy & Smith (2007: 297) examine how " 'evidence' generated from select academic and policy research, statistics, evaluations and pilot projects" are tools of "advanced liberal governmentality". Halperin (1995: 18) suggests:

> modern forms of governmentality actually *require* citizens to be free, so that citizens can assume from the state the burden of some of its former regulatory functions and impose on themselves – of their own afford – rules of conduct and mechanisms of control….liberal power…normalizes, "responsibilizes," and disciplines.

Within a Foucauldian framework, LGBT research conducted as part of advanced liberal governmentality can be seen as a tool of self-regulation and reverse discourse. Grundy & Smith (2007) emphasize how social science research raises the "thorny issue of 'ontological politics'" (300) and caution these tools' usefulness as "LGBT social science makes some queer realities real at the expense of others" (299). They point to the Canadian 2006 census for making visible those in same-sex relationships and making invisible transgender, intersex, transsexual people as well as LGBT and queer people not in same-sex relationships.

> We have not arrived as individuals, but as relationships. It is not gay men and lesbians who have arrived, but same-sex couples…. It is part of the way in which our membership as sexual minorities in the Canadian nation is mediated through the lens of respectable relationships. (Cossman as cited in Grundy & Smith 2007: 303)

The undercurrent of Grundy & Smith's argument is useful in highlighting another characteristic of queer methodologies – that is, rejecting attempts to legitimize and solidify shifting, mobile existences. One feature of this act centres on how respectability gets taken up and who gets constructed as reputable within the heteronormative frameworks. This feature of respectability is one I associate with a homonormative agenda as it advocates for rights and benefits for the "normal" ones at the expense of ones who are constructed as deviant. Some important questions to ask to guard against reconstituting this normative agenda in methodology are related to the research's ontology and epistemology: Who is getting measured and who is not getting counted? Can you quantify something fluid and shifting?

Philosophically speaking, Ahmed (2006) proposes a queer phenomenology. Phenomenology looks to describe the lived experience or the essence of a phenomenon.   The idea of intentionality of consciousness is also significant in a phenomenological study as:

> this idea is that consciousness always is directed *towards* an object. Reality of an object, then, is inextricably *related to one's consciousness of it*. Thus, reality, according to

Husserl, is not divided into subjects and objects, thus shifting the Cartesian duality to the meaning of an object that appears in consciousness. (italics added, Creswell 1998: 53)

What links phenomenology as a research methodology and Ahmed's ideas of queer phenomenology are the attention to orientation and ontology. Ahmed (2006: 68) suggests "a queer phenomenology might offer an approach to sexual orientation [and racialization] by rethinking how the bodily direction "toward" objects shapes the surfaces of bodily and social space". She continues to expand on how this approach "would function as a disorientation device; it would not overcome the 'disalignments' of the horizontal and vertical axes, allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world" (Ahmed 2006: 172). For a research methodology, queering the *orientation* of the researcher or calling into being a queer ontological perspective would support phenomenology as a queer methodology. Crucially, however, though existences are only able to *be* if we are conscious of them, Ahmed (2006: 179) warns:

> queer is not available as a line that we follow, and if we took such a line we would perform a certain injustice to those queers whose lives are lived for different points. For me, the question is not so much finding a queer line but rather asking what our orientation toward queer moments of deviation will be.

Her question can also speak to cautions of queer methodologies: to not solidify or essentialize our orientation within a research paradigm, but to examine the moments of Otherness, the strange, the deviant, the disorientation.

(Re)shaping Methodology

Several researchers, theorists and academics have taken up queer methodologies (Halberstam 1998; Holliday 2000). My goal is to articulate what is unique about a queer methodology. I propose queer methodologies are shifting, changing and becoming. I argue queer methodologies have a particular interest in a way of being that centres a particular kind of politics – a queer ontology. Conceptualizing ways of being beyond the binary systems of positivism means that certain existences come into view. The goal of my queer methodology, at this particular time, is to do several things: first, to challenge invisibility, normalcy and stability which are produced by dichotomous understandings; second, to resist neo-liberal, assimilation and reverse discourses; and last, to expose and deconstruct respectability, heteronormativity and homonormativity. For my own work, discourse analysis is of particular interest as I examine HIV research findings. A queer methodology enables me to ask questions rooted in a poststructural feminist perspective in a way other methodologies prohibit. My political agenda embedded within my methodology directly impacts on practices of sexual health care and research.

Practicing a Queer Methodology

As an area of great significance to those who practice non-normative sex, sexual health reveals hetero- and homonormative understandings. A queer analysis unearths these undercurrents which remain obscured by a normative approach and partially invisible even through a LGBT lens. I expand on how a queer methodology can expose and disrupt these deadly agendas.

The history of the modern gay liberation movement is deeply impacted by the effects of HIV/AIDS. For decades, sexual deviants have challenged dominant, heteronormative

understandings of sexuality and found "ways of breaking down monopolies of professional expertise, ways of democratizing knowledge, and ways of credentializing the disempowered so that they can intervene in the medical and governmental administration of the epidemic" (Halperin 1995: 28). HIV/AIDS is a site of contestation of politics, specifically in terms of how identity politics impact the visibility of various sexual identities.

When gay men and lesbians (or any sexual minorities, for that matter) are viewed under an "ethnic identity model," it "promotes a view of sexuality as an essentially private matter that produces some discord when individuals are prevented from accessing legal or civil rights enjoyed by the mainstream" (Hick 2008: 68). Relating back to ontological politics, it also essentializes gay men and lesbians as a knowable, stable category. This is relevant to research methodologies in that:

> Reliance upon an ethnic identity model also discourages reflexivity about the ways in which sexuality is theorized. So a 'lesbian and gay affirmative practice' simply reinforces the sexual identity model, and even suggests, 'there is no need to develop a new model or theory of social work practice with lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.' (Hicks 2008: 68-69)

Some gay men and lesbians, primarily those who deem themselves "respectable," promote certain sexualities and thus take up a homonormative agenda. This does two things: first, it makes trans, intersex, pansexual and other queer people invisible and deviant; and second, it reconstitutes reverse discourses working against gay liberation by not calling into question what is normal. By making gay and lesbian identities circumscribable (regardless of who is doing this) through an ethnic identity model, we all become quantifiable and fixed. The danger of this is that once we have been sufficiently studied (by the omnipresent, hetero/homonormative dominant), the hetero-norm is reaffirmed "because heterosexuality is the standard from which others are seen to differ" and reifies homosexual as an object of study (Hicks 2008: 68).

A queer methodology intentionally does not attempt to reify mobile, unstable "disorientations." Instead, it exposes hetero- and homonormativity. A queer methodology reveals the complex plurality of sex, gender and sexuality. In analyzing the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association's (2006) *Guidelines For Care Of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual And Transgender Patients* and the Public Health Agency of Canada's (2006) *Canadian Guidelines On Sexually Transmitted Infections* with a queer methodology, what is made clear is how sex and gender categories are stabilized within the binary systems of male/female and man/woman (Manning, forthcoming). In an attempt to minimize the essentializing of sexuality, the terms "men who have sex with men" (MSM) and "women who have sex with women" are employed. This conflation of sex and gender not only obscures these social constructions, but makes invisible intersex, trans and queer people. "Within a binary heterosexual/homosexual paradigm, what is a transgendered person's gender opposite? Or better yet, why must we define our sexuality in relation to gender object choices rather than in relation to sexual acts themselves?" (Thaemlitz 2006: 182). Although the term MSM was initially used to trouble the seemingly distinct categories of homosexual and heterosexual, it is problematic as it is firmly entrenched within the binary construct of sex.

Welle et al. (2006) examine queer youths' existence on the periphery of lesbian and trans communities as they seek services. Their work troubles dominant heteronormative understandings and problematizes lesbian and transgender hegemony. Similarly, Fausto-Sterling (2000: 3) exposes how "labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision" immersed in heterosexual understandings of the world. As a biologist and social activist, she diligently and methodically undermines the "natural" categories of sex and makes visible multiple sex categories. She intentionally locates her own politics within her work by arguing argument for the truth of Haraway's observation that biology is politics by other means (1986, cited in Fausto-Sterling 2000: 255). Fausto-Sterling's work exemplifies how even within science, one's politics and ontology can shift one's gaze to uncover existences obscured by the heteronormative framework. These approaches reveal how hetero- and homonormativity both work to erase queer existences.

Concluding
Although I do not make the argument for a specific queer methodology, I wish to contribute to the on-going conversation regarding queer methodologies. It is imperative that the ontology of researcher and research project question modernist ideas based on binary understandings. Embedded in research methodologies and methods are dichotomies of all kinds: homo/hetero, man/woman, female/male and insider/outsider, which need to be problematized as they simplify and erase the plurality we exist in. By deconstructing these binary notions, we call into being multiple existences previously rendered deviant or invisible. Resisting solidification of a queer approach to methodology is also important. By allowing disorientation, contradiction and plurality to exist within research, queer methodology remains reflexive through continually challenging its own character.

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