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Introduction to "Queering the Writing Center"

By Michele Eodice

*At first I was afraid—I was petrified
Kept thinking I could never live without you by my side
But then I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong
And I grew strong
And I learned how to get along*

By 2005, the disco era was long over, but queering in the academy was really just hitting its stride. If you were reading Harry Denny's article in 2005, when it came out (pun intended), and if you were not quite familiar with how queer theory might operate in critiques of the writing center, you may have been afraid. I am queer and I was afraid too. I was afraid I did not really know how queer theory could inform my work. Being queer in and of itself, of course, has nothing to do with queer theory, so I put my individual queerness aside and took up queer theory because the first thing I got out of queer theory is that it is not primarily about an identity we need to acknowledge ("Oh, he is gay!"). It is really more about queer as a way to understand identity, through a theory that borrows its bends and twists from the actual experiences of the fringe—and the performance that follows these experiences—to form a generative way to view the world.

Queer theory challenges what is "normal" and questions the mechanics behind our and our institutions' efforts to maintain "normal." Queer theory can help you get over yourself, and, as a result, the words, bodies, spaces, and beliefs that you hold dear will be

called upon to respond. Harry's article instructs us on how to listen to the response. For if our shared mission is to enact a productive inclusion, we need to pay attention to this admonishment:

In writing centers, people from the margins are frequently the majority population, yet tutors and other writing center professionals often do not tap these students' own innate social and cultural literacies as resources for aiding their academic work. (107)

I know some of us embraced Harry's article from the start, and we now ask our students to read it too. One reason I nominated this article for republication in this special issue is based on what student consultants tell me after reading it: they say things like "of course." When pushed a bit, they see this idea of queering as an important element of our everyday because queering functions both as a "this is what it is, folks" reality pill and an "imagine if this were queered" awakening. This article clearly had the desired effect (at least from my perspective) on one of our writing consultants, Dusty Bailey; he wrote this in his reflection on Harry's ideas:

While there are practical applications for queer theory in the writing center (I think challenging the students' identities by opening up their view of the world would do nothing but improve writing), I'm not sure if this would work unless those who grade the papers are enlightened as well.

What any reader of "Queering the Writing Center" should come away with, at the very very least, is this understanding of the potential for queer theory to "advance awareness of the presence and multiplicity of binaries" in our daily work:

Writing centers are places overflowing with structuring binaries: directive/non-directive, editing/tutoring, expert/novice, teacher/student, graduate student/undergraduate, professional/peer, women/men, "American"/ESL, advanced/basic, faculty/administrator, administrator/secretary, faculty/lecturer, lecturer/teaching assistant, teaching assistant/tutor, white/people of color, black/Asian, latino/black, straight/gay, etc. These binaries and their negotiations of which side is privileged and which is legitimate are ubiquitous in sessions. (97)

Queering is not theory *du'jour*. Think of queer theory as one more lens you can adopt to view your work through; after all, we

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have activated other theories, like feminist, Marxist, Bakhtinian, and Rogerian in order to understand writing centers and student writers.

If you avoided this article in 2005, you likely thought: I don't need to queer my writing center. I don't want to queer my writing center. I have enough to do.

But here you are, ever so close to reading the article. Take the (queer) bait now and read this article without fear.

WORK CITED

Perrin, Freddie and Dino Fekaris. Lyrics.
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1978. CD.