A Pragmatic Methodology for the (Queer) Self

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A PRAGMATIC METHODOLOGY FOR THE (QUEER) SELF

by

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“The old self is put off and the new self is only forming, and the form it finally takes will depend upon the unforeseeable result of an adventure.”

John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*

My first foray into philosophy, first term, freshman year at Lawrence University, introduced me to John Dewey through *Human Nature and Conduct*. Thirteen years later, I fondly remember two examples John Dreher used in that Introduction to Philosophy. I remember that even twin daughters, Angelica and Maleficent — having the same parents, friends, schooling, and upbringing — nonetheless have their own unique perspectives on the world. I also remember John Dreher, dramatically: “I’m a steel worker up on the high beams (Not really! Not really!) and I hear the lunch whistle blow. But, oh no! My lunch pail is four beams away!” Working his way, beam by beam, to safely reach his lunch, I learned the continuity of means and ends.

I have had the great fortune of finding two unendingly encouraging advisors and mentors to guide me through my graduate career. My intrigue for the pragmatists was nurtured in my master’s program by another avid Dewean. Writing my MA thesis with Frank Ryan was a mutually adjusting experience for both of us. Thank you, Dr. Ryan, for your extensive comments and encouragement more glowing than I could hope for. I am also indebted to Dan Smith for creating a space at Purdue for me to study the intersection of pragmatism and queer theory. At a key moment, when I questioned my fortitude, Dan affirmed my passion: “This is not my wheelhouse, but reading Dewey is what gets you; I will make a space for you to do it.” Your enthusiasm helped sustain this project during the moments where my conviction faltered.

Thank you, as well, to my gracious committee members, Drs. Charlene Seigfried, William McBride, and Helga Varden. Each of you contributed to the process/product represented
within these pages, but also to the scholar I am as I move forward. Charlene, I am honored by the opportunity to work under your tutelage. I hope that this project represents one step in extending your extensive work at the intersections of pragmatism and feminism towards transactions with queer theory. Thank you, Dr. McBride, for the opportunity to thoughtfully engage Beauvoir’s work. Your seminars were ones I looked forward to most. And Helga, I admire your calm composure handling difficult topics and critics far more diplomatically than perhaps I manage.

There is a vast coterie of friends and family who all deserve heartfelt thanks. I hope they do not begrudge me saving space by omitting names. I appreciate the presence of each of you in my life and thank you for comprising my social world.

My concluding thanks go toward two people who have engendered my best qualities, both relationally and academically: my parents, Peter and Gail Blum. Dad, I am proud to be the second Dr. Blum in the family. And Mom, try as you might to wave away the suggestion that you have a mind for philosophy, transactions with both of you have shaped the ideas within these pages. Thanks to both of you for guiding and supporting all of the disparate me’s.
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ABSTRACT

Taking LGBTIA+ experiences as the starting point for theorizing, I propose that pragmatic methodologies ameliorate several problems that queer theory encounters in defining queer subjectivity. The challenge is that any definition of queer selfhood must simultaneously (i) elude essential or fixed definitions of the subject, gender, and the relationship between them, and nonetheless (ii) enable efficacious political action and recognition.

Utilizing the work of John Dewey and Jane Addams, I argue that the social self provides a beneficial framework for accommodating and celebrating queer lives. Adopting a pragmatic methodology emphasizes the irreducible plurality of perspectives and develops theory out of and ultimately accountable to practice. When we combine pragmatic methodologies with queer concerns, we not only celebrate the queerness of LGBTIA+ individuals, but we further realize that to be a self at all is to be queer. That is, the social nature of the self means that it can destabilize the very social institutions and relations that enable, guide, and constrain its projects; we bear the potential to queer the norms that situate and define us.
INTRODUCTION

We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves.
- John Dewey, *Art as Experience*¹

Any inquiry begins with the irritation of doubt. My inaugurating inquiry is how to articulate an account of the self that recognizes the full range of its embodiments. When we begin to define the contours of selfhood, we already implicate rules of sex, gender, and desire. In order to give a holistic account of the self, we must also give an account of these concepts as well. On this point, I perennially return to a quote from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*:

> It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.²

I am interested in giving an account of the self that begins with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual and other non-binary (LGBTIA+) individuals’ experiences. These selves are all-too-often marginalized or marked as exceptions to the theoretical rule that persons normally inhabit the world as male or female, masculine or feminine, attracted to men or women. Yet, when we begin to take LGBTIA+ experiences seriously, we begin to problematize any easy identification between sex, gender, and desire. The mechanisms by which we constitute and understand each in relation to one another become visible. This is where our inquiry begins.

**Commitments**

Allow me to be up-front about two central commitments that frame this project. First, I am committed to pragmatism as a methodology. It is one of my framing intellectual habits,

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constitutive of how my mind operates. Second, I am committed to queer theory as both a critical lens and a position which places concerns of gender – especially those genders considered ‘marginal’ – at the fore of analysis.

**Pragmatism**

As a methodology, pragmatism conceives of thought as a problem-solving activity in which knowledge has something ‘to do.’ We think because some question or problem occasions inquiry; disruptions our habitual grasp upon the world. In response to particulars of the situation, we search for that which satiates doubt, that which solves our problem. As Dewey describes, our method is

> both a science and an art; a science so far as it gives an organized and tested descriptive account of the way in which thought actually goes on; an art, so far as on the basis of this description it projects methods by which future thinking shall take advantage of the operations that lead to success and avoid those which result in failure.³

This anticipates Dewey’s more developed account of the *method of inquiry*. I like to offer this to my students as an account of what we do as philosophers generally. We attempt to articulate a problem such that it begins to suggest a solution; we get a sense for what causes irritation and what it would mean to resolve it. Based on the conceptual frameworks available to us, we then attempt to project certain hypotheses that might satisfy the problem.

Three pragmatic tendencies will be of continual importance throughout this project. First, a pragmatic methodology commits us to developing theory and knowledge out of and ultimately accountable to practice, behavior, and implementation. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey argues that frameworks of philosophy develop within certain contexts framed by specific human

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affairs. As such, the measure of their efficacy should be their serviceability in application. What this means for our current venture is that I both begin with and remain accountable to the experiences and issues specific to LGBTIA+ contexts. Since it is my intention to theorize the self by taking seriously currently marginalized embodiments, the measure of success for this project will be the extent to which it offers these individuals recognition and representation.

Second, pragmatists place central importance on relationships, not only between myself and others, but also the ways in which I relate and transact with my environment(s). This is what we refer to as the social self. What we are develops in transaction with our social and material world. As George Herbert Mead writes, the self is “essentially a social phenomenon.” Dewey similarly writes: “through resistances encountered, the nature of the self is discovered. The self is both formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment.” Further, Jane Addams continually stresses the importance of exposing ourselves to diverse classes of people and choosing experiences wisely. Encountering others’ dissimilar perspectives remind us of the partiality of our own. They reveal prejudices in how we conceive the world based upon our situation within it and allow us to develop a more “democratic interest in life.” A significant portion of this project will be dedicated to discussing how the social self helpfully conceptualizes LGBTIA+ lives.

Third, and interrelated with the previous two points, pragmatism offers a pluralistic conception of truth that acknowledges variance in the knowledges and situations of those who

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4 He reiterates this point again in his reflections on the piece twenty-five years later: “the distinctive office, problems and subjectmatters of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and that, accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on...” Dewey, “Reconstruction as Seen Twenty-Five Years Later,” an introduction to Reconstruction in Philosophy, iii.


6 Dewey, Art as Experience, 293.

7 Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics (Urbana, IL: Univ. of IL Press, 2002), 9.
practice its methodologies. Our experiences and the relations we have shape the lens with which we view the world, our processes of problem-solving, and our habits of interaction. As Charlene Seigfried writes, “reality is always as much a function of one’s angle of vision and lived experience as it is of what is available to be experienced…”

Individuals are differentially situated in relation to social institutions and power dynamics based on factors of their identity such as sex, gender, race, class, ability/disability, education level, and so on. These things bear upon our transaction with and interpretation of our surrounding world – how we form relationships, what opportunities we take to be open to us, what interests we cultivate – whether we are aware of how they affect us or not.

**Queer Theory**

I am drawn to queer theory for at least two reasons. First, doing justice to the self’s full range of embodiments entails giving voice to not only normative cases of selfhood, but also its more ‘borderline’ or ‘marginal’ cases. Since gender is one of the significant ways in which we are embodied, as many feminist authors note, gender is pervasively implicated in our modes of interacting with one another. Second, queer theory interrogates the very conditions by which we recognize selves and authenticate subjects. It does not consider “What is the self?” to be prior to “What is gender?,” nor does it conceive of these as separate questions. When I speak of myself, I do so not separate from my gendered position nor the various lenses through which I understand my world. My understanding of gender norms in general and my gender in particular — whether I am currently aware of them or not — in part constitute my approach to the world and how I embody, express, and live my self. What it means to be a person is to be gendered in some way.

It is within a queer theoretical framework that I refer to LGBTIA+ individuals as queer.

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In one way or another, they transgress what Butler terms “the compulsory order of sex, gender, and desire.” That is, we presume that intelligible gender conforms to the pattern of biological males living as men who desire women and vice versa. More broadly, *queer* can describe that which is odd, peculiar, unexpected, or that which does not meet the norm. Taken together, these conceptions of queerness (re)present the possibility to queer or for queering. For example, norms become queered by being embodied in a queer (peculiar, off-center) way. Queer embodiment challenges the function and/or adequacy of gender terminology and offers the possibility of re-signification; it reveals ways in which our concepts, categories, and/or meanings are not fixed, foundational, or necessary.

Note: this offers only a preliminary sketch of what queerness can refer to in our contemporary contexts. One of my first ends-in-view will be to further delineate these multiple senses of queerness that are variably interrelated and/or contradictory and recalcitrantly problematic.  

Coupling my commitments to pragmatism and queer theory is not simply because I find an affinity with both. If we reason only insofar as some perplexity occasions thought, our inquiry into the relationship(s) between gender and selfhood begins with cases in which this relationship is most perplexing. In contemporary North American contexts, LGBTIA+ identities are among those which are the most socially contested, since they deviate from the presupposed norm of sex, gender, and desire. They are odd, strange, dissident, unexpected, taboo, and so on. Concurrently, these cases also challenge, or at least question, the naturalness and/or necessity of gender norms. This is what Butler means when she describes the queer as a “site of collective

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10 From here on, readers can assume that I intend ‘problematic’ in the pragmatic sense of the term, i.e. as occasioning inquiry or resisting easy/habitual resolution. I do not intend the term to implicate negative valuation.
In pragmatic terms, the queer is an experience of *secondness*, experience of effort or resistance.\(^{12}\)

Taking queer cases of gender as the focus of our study will throw into relief how gender norms function. Jack Halberstam opens *Female Masculinity* with this point: “…far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity…. [It] becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body.”\(^{13}\) Marjorie Garber uses similar reasoning for her focus on ‘trans’ cases:

…these apparently marginal or aberrant cases, that of the transvestite and the transsexual, both define and problematize the entire concept of “male subjectivity.” It is by looking at them, and at the cultural gaze that both constructs and regards them, that we can best test out the viability of the term.\(^{14}\)

Perhaps paradoxically, queer selves provide a clear point of departure by muddying the clarity or fixity of the norms which seek to determine them. Insofar as the application of gender norms becomes problematic — such as in giving an account of queer selves — the normative, habitual, or unproblematic, everyday articulation of gender norms fall away and demand re-adjustment to how we think about these concepts.

In interrogating queer/borderline cases of gender, I will account for gender in its perceived normative instantiations as well. Making gender ‘problematic’ takes it out of the realm of habitual experience and allows it to be the subject of inquiry. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey describes a habit as “a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts [that is] an

\(^{11}\) Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *GLQ*, vol. 1:19.


immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious
choices."\textsuperscript{15} This is the sense in which I say gender can be habitual: we embody certain gender
norms that we take to describe our bodies; our embodiment of them predisposes us to specific
acts governed by those norms (such as femininity or masculinity). Insofar as we make gender
problematic, we question these dispositions and create the possibility to adjust and/or queer them
as a result.

One final note on the commitments that frame this project: In assuming a vantage that
takes gender to be our primary inquiry into the self, I do not presume to claim that this is the
primary entry into theorizing the self. Just as gender is already implicated in the question of
selfhood, so are other registers of subjectivity, such as race and class. It is a lofty goal to think
these variances all at once, yet whatever theory of the self is illuminated by considering gender
must accommodate these inextricably intersecting complexities and nuances. As bell hooks
poignantly argues, we only begin to holistically account for how gender relations operate when
we consider the differential ways in which gender operates along racial and economic lines.\textsuperscript{16}
My focus will be on gender and its relation to how we know the self. However, I acknowledge –
and hope to keep in my readers’ minds as well – that this necessitates bringing in considerations
of race and class whenever possible.

Challenges for Queer Theory

Both a virtue of and a challenge for queer theory is that its subject is not fixed. In

“What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?,” David Eng et. al. characterizes this a strength, “that

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. bell hooks, “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression,” in \textit{Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center},
2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 19.
queer has no fixed political referent.”\(^{17}\) Taken in its most charitable reading, this means that whom queer theory seeks to speak for is adaptable in relation to what political assumptions and power relations are in play. In the opening pages of *Gender Trouble*, Butler appeals to Foucault:

“…juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent…. [T]he feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation.”\(^{18}\) Likewise, we constitute – determine, define, delineate – queer subjects in the very process by which we seek to gain representation for them. That is, we define the queer subject by what institutions and norms we appeal to, what conceptions we bring to discourse and – just as importantly – what conceptions, relations, and identifications we exclude. Hence, there is no fixed referent for the subject of queer theory or what it means to be a queer self.

However, others challenge that queer theory’s characteristic deconstruction of the subject leaves no vantage from which concrete subjects/selves can speak *as* queer (or under whatever other marginalized position identified by common experiences). Christine Di Stefano references Nancy Harstock on this point:

> Why is it, just at the moment in Western history when previously silenced populations have begun to speak for themselves and on behalf of their subjectivities, that the concept of the subject and the possibility of discovering/creating a liberating “truth” become suspect?\(^{19}\)

Though Di Stefano refers to feminist postmodern epistemologies, this critique easily extends to denying queer subjectivities as well.\(^{20}\) Insofar as queer theory seeks political representation for

\(^{17}\) David L. Eng, J. Jack Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” in *Social Text* v. 23, no 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005), 3.
queer individuals and insofar as we intend to do justice to queer subjectivities, there must be some way of talking about those whom we wish to represent and do justice to.

Critics’ objection to queer theory’s deconstruction of the subject is one of the primary challenges I will address in theorizing the self. Any account of queer selfhood must simultaneously (i) elude essential or fixed definitions of the subject, gender, and the relationship between them, and nonetheless (ii) enable efficacious political action and recognition.

Other challenges closely follow this one. For example, David Halperin voices the contention that queer theory’s eschewal of identity claims — such as man, woman, heterosexual, trans, etc. — has “the misleading effect of portraying all previous work in lesbian and gay studies as under-theorized, as laboring under the delusion of identity politics…” In other words, though queer theory masquerades as liberating critique, as dismantling oppressive structures of dominance, it instantiates itself as the dominant mode of critique by subjugating others such as gay and lesbian studies.

Authors likewise argue ‘queerness’ is not inclusive term queer theorists take it to be. For example, Sheila Jeffreys and Jay Prosser claim that queer theory privileges the narratives of gay male culture such as camp and drag. Others argue that queer theory misrepresents LGBTIA+ identities that are not marginalized on the basis of sexuality. Insofar as I intend to use queer in an inclusive sense, I will need to address these significant concerns.

Thus, defining queerness is itself a fickle project. On the one hand, if we expand the meaning of queer such that it is not attached to sex/gender/sexuality, then we might deny the

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history of the word and the specific oppressions related to those identities. On the other hand, we have the call to incorporate other forms of (intersecting) oppressions, which have the grounds for possible queering/destabilization in the myriad disparate intersections. For my own concerns, I am committed to recognizing an inclusively queer constituency, those individuals who deviate from the norm in its myriad ways. Most specifically, I want to consider the queerness of transgender and intersex individuals. Yet, I also want to acknowledge more ‘mundane’ or ‘everyday’ queerness in identities that we do not typically identify as queer. I want to be able to hold in tension these seemingly competing impulses: recognizing the specificity of the queer in cases of marginal genders while simultaneously encouraging us to think of the queer as more pervasive and less uncommon.

My Objective / End-in-View

The primary thrust of this thesis will be to explicate the queer self in dual senses. First, beginning with queer praxis, I aim to conceptualize the self in a way that is faithful to how LGBTIA+ individuals experience themselves. I offer pragmatism’s methodologies and its conception of the social self – particularly as developed by John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Jane Addams – as the best framework for celebrating queer selves in this sense. Inextricably interwoven in this project is a second sense in which I explicate the queer self: in combining the social self with queer concerns, we thereby queer the social self. The social nature of the self means that it can destabilize the very social institutions and relations that enable, guide, and constrain its projects. As such, we bear the potential to queer the norms that situate and define us. Having established this thesis, I will then reconsider those challenges often leveled against queer theory. In pragmatic fashion, I will test the validity of my hypothesis by arguing that the queer self ameliorates these concerns.
In Outline

As already patterned through these introductory remarks, the course of my argument follows the pragmatic method of inquiry. First, some problem or perplexity occasions thought. Having defined the problem(s), we then look to what tools and data are available to us, given the nature of the situation. Based on our articulation of the problem and its evaluation in terms of our tools/data at hand, we then formulate a hypothesis and test it in application to see if it satisfies the question/problem and the nature of the situation out of which it arose. If our hypothesis satisfies the problem and ameliorates confusion, it guides us truly, reorients our experiential lens, and allows us greater maneuverability in the world.

Chapter 1: Queer Concerns

To first articulate the problem that frames our inquiry, I begin by defining queerness and overviewing common problems for queer theory’s conception of the self. The purpose of my first chapter is to introduce the primary problems for theorizing the self when taking queerness as a starting point. First, I discuss problems endemic to attempts to define queerness itself, since its denotation includes a lack of fixity. A significant tension here is how to conceptualize queerness broadly enough to encompass all those cases I want to identify as queer – including transgender and intersex cases, but also more ‘mundane’ or ‘subtle’ queerness – without losing specificity of the term altogether.

Second, I overview Judith Butler’s framework of the performative self as a leading account of queer selfhood. This provides the theoretical framework that is the subject of many of the most salient critiques of queer theory. A thorough consideration of such challenges comprises the remainder of this chapter. Specifically, I focus on four objections and/or challenges:
(i.) Queer theory’s deconstruction of the subject eliminates the possibility of theorizing a notion of self that is specifically ‘queer’ and thus prevents efficacious political action and/or recognition for queer subjects.

(ii.) If ‘queerness’ most centrally refers to sexuality, it misrepresents intersex and trans individuals, insofar as these identifications are made on bases other than sexuality.

(iii.) Its disavowal of identifications betrays individuals’ experiences of themselves as centrally framed around a certain identity (such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, trans, etc.).

(iv.) It misrepresents trans issues by championing them as paradigms of subverting gender norms and devaluing the importance of the body in trans narratives.

In this chapter, I take a first pass at answering each of these challenges, ending with what I take to be their strongest formulation.

Chapter Two: The Social Self

Apt formulation of the problem begins to suggest the tools and data at our disposal for answering it. In explaining those problems most often leveled at queer theory, I also introduce the tools available within queer theory itself for formulating the self. The second chapter expands our toolset by introducing the social self, primarily as presented in the works of Dewey, Mead, and Addams. I begin by explaining two recurring themes in Dewey’s work: first, the inalienable, co-constitutive relationship of organism and environment; second, the multiple ways in which this relationship is a social one. The self emerges in its multiple transactions with environments that are irreducibly material and social.

Though, for the pragmatists, the self always exists in social transaction, this does not diminish the potential for individual creativity and innovation. I emphasize this by appealing to
Mead’s writings. The self is situated in social processes and relations such that it develops its own unique perspective. Self denotes all those attitudes that others take towards “me” and the way(s) in which “I” interpret, collate, and respond to them. The transaction(s) between “me” and “I” help explain how the self and social habits can have a mutually-adjusting relationship.

I end my overview of the social self with Addams’ account of the dual personal and social responsibilities that we have in choosing how to comport ourselves. One of Addams’ central commitments is to foster a “democratic interest in life,” which includes choosing to engage with others whose situations vary from our own – politically, economically, racially, and/or otherwise – thereby putting ourselves in contact with diverging perspectives. A key virtue of such practice is that others can reveal certain prejudicial attitudes we have because of our necessarily partial grasp upon the world. I discuss the ways in which the Hull House settlement was an embodiment of this project for Addams.

Chapter Three: The (Queer) Self

My third chapter combines the pragmatic framework of the social self with the definition(s) of queerness developed in the first chapter. I argue that combining these concepts yields two significant results. First, the social self is especially apt in accommodating queerness, since it is dynamic and fluid, the transaction of organism and environment, shared norms and our personal embodiment of them. That is, pragmatism offers a meaningful formulation of selfhood that allows us to talk about social identities and solidarity in experiences and projects without attributing any essential nature to the self and/or to differentially sexed/gendered/sexual bodies. Second, I argue that, in applying the pragmatic framework to LGBTIA+ contexts, we thereby queer the social self. As we stand varyingly in relation to and at a distance from the various
norms and habits that inscribe us, our unique negotiation and embodiment of them holds the potential to queer their signification.

Following this proposal, I defend my hypothesis against what I anticipate as possible objections to this contentious claim. Most importantly, I explain how conceptualizing all selves as queer in some sense engenders greater recognition for individuals who are queer in a narrower sense, i.e. LGBTIA+ individuals. To do this, I explicate how we can (and should) prevent my proposal from co-opting the term queer and thus undermining what limited recognition LGBTIA+ individuals currently have under the term.

Chapter Four: Reconstructing Queer Concerns

My fourth chapter answers the challenges raised in Chapter One with this new conception of the queer self. First, I explain how appealing to pragmatists' frameworks for reformulating the self also provides concrete historical models and suggestions for social transformation. Here I adapt proposals from Dewey and Addams for contemporary contexts to suggest ways in which we might reconstitute our material/social environments to better serve queer selves.

Second, I defend against an inevitable objection to my conceptualization of queerness, i.e. that it broadens the term’s designation into insignificance. Rather, a pragmatic approach grants that there are multiple meanings that vary depending on the nature of the situation in which we employ the term. There is precedence in queer theory for using ‘queerness’ in ways that do not simply designate sexuality. Nonetheless, I also outline several criteria for permeably delimiting queerness.

Third, I readdress how to conceptualize identifications and what role they play in self-and social-recognition. This discussion hinges upon recognizing identifications as provisional and partial. Most basically, we identify with a certain categorization and reify this identification
in how we embody it; yet our embodiment stands to change the trajectory of the identification’s designation. Furthermore, we bear *multiple* relationships to various norms, groups, and identities such that we do them justice only in recognizing them as partial.

Finally, I consider how conceptualizing the self as queer addresses the concern that queer theory – specifically, the performative self – misrepresents trans lives. Here I appeal to three aspects of a pragmatic methodology: (i) the continuity of body-mind; (ii) the multiplicity of the self; and (iii) a pluralistic understanding of truth. In short, when we re-conceptualize the self as a hub of social transactions, we gain the ability to recognize gender beyond a binary framework and allow for a more dynamic, multiple expression of any self-embodiment.

**Chapter Five: Transactions of Pragmatism and Queer Theory**

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey describes a work of art as both a culmination and a carrying forward. This is what I aim to impart in my concluding chapter: to demonstrate how the current project can reorient experience and frame future inquiries. Drawing this project to a close, I reiterate points of intersection between pragmatism and queer theory, as well as shared aims that make the two fields particularly compatible. I also argue for ways in which queer theory can complement pragmatic methodologies and vice versa. To carry this work forward, I propose several projects that could further capitalize on the coupling of these fields.
CHAPTER 1. QUEER CONCERNS

Thinking which is a method of reconstructing experience treats observation of facts, on the other hand, as the indispensable step of defining the problem, of locating the trouble, of forcing home a definite... sense of what the difficulty is and where it lies.¹

This is a chapter of problematics. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and delineate the query that will guide us through subsequent chapters. That is, how to account for the self in such a way that allows for its myriad gendered embodiments. In another sense, the aim of this chapter is to discuss the subject of queer theory. This means identifying the individuals, groups, and/or ideas that feature in queer analysis. It also means taking the existence and lived experiences of queer individuals as the basis for (re)considering what it means to be a subject and/or a self.

Part of the purpose of this chapter will be to explicate the indeterminacy of these questions and the implications of that indeterminacy for establishing recognition for queer selves. On the one hand, we do not want to be too narrow and exclusionary. As Butler notes, whatever we exclude is always retained as a possibility for further contestation.² On the other hand, if we cast our terms and domain too broadly, we fail to do justice to the particularity of varying queer selves and queerness loses its specificity and significance.

To this end, I will explicate the queer on three fronts. First, I will discuss the problems in defining queerness and how its problematic elusiveness is part of what characterizes it. Second, I will discuss queerness within the context of Judith Butler’s notion of the performative self. Third, I will introduce several of what I take to be the most salient charges against queer theory’s

¹ Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 81.
² Butler, Gender Trouble, 6.
current representation of or ability to represent queer selves. These critiques center around the
question of what or who the subject of queer theory is, or rather, what all the queer encompasses.

1.1 The Queer

Queerness is problematic in at least two senses of the term. First, it is problematic insofar
as it eludes fixed definition. One of its principle characteristics is its indeterminacy, deferred
meaning, and elusive nature. To systematize it or fix a definition would be to violate the notion
itself. Thus, attempting to define it is a problem: how to define queerness broadly enough to
encompass its several, perhaps dissonant, meanings and instantiations while remaining specific
enough to retain descriptive significance. Second, queerness is problematic in that it
problematizes and holds the potential to queer.

Let us begin with the connotations of the word. Queer is often used as an epithet, a slur,
meant to demean, to put someone in their place as lesser and perverse, morally aberrant. As
Michael Warner writes in his introduction to Fear of a Queer Planet, the term — as adopted for
denigrating gay and lesbian individuals — was “generated in the context of terror.”

Stephen Valocchi explains that queerness coalesced as a collective identity in the first half of the
twentieth century in response to middle class men attempting to “rescue their masculinity”
within the context of changing work and gender relations. Butler, as well, describes the
genealogy of queerness as

one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or,
rather, the producing of a subject through that interpellation. “Queer” derives its force

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3 Michael Warner, introduction to Fear of a Queer Planet (Minneapolis: Univ. of MN Press, 1993), xxvi.
4 Valocchi notes these “threats” to masculinity included “loss of autonomy and increased specialization of their
mental labor at work” as well as increased numbers of immigrant workers with alternative gender conventions.
In an attempt to rescue their masculinity from these threats, middle class men began to define exclusive
heterosexuality as a sign of masculinity… The ever present threat of ‘the fairy within us’ led middle class
men to police more vigilantly their own social relations for any signs of homosexual behavior.
precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult.  

I will never use the term or its variants in a negative or pejorative manner. Rather, I accept connotations of the word that indicate discomfort, dislocation, riskiness, and confusion. For example, Sara Ahmed describes queerness as that which is “off-center,” “slantwise,” or “where the world no longer appears ‘the right way up.’”  

This latter set of connotations indicates that queerness presents opportunities for pause, re-evaluation, and reformulation.  

In its most narrow usage, queer identifies gay sexuality; cast more broadly, queer identifies the spectrum of individuals that associate with the LGBTIA+ community.  

This includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, and asexual individuals. One reason for the proliferation of letters is that queer theory contests fixed identification claims. ‘Plus’ leaves open other possible and permeable signifiers of queer persons. For example, the term “non-binary” is gaining popularity. Other individuals simply describe their gender as ‘queer,’ to indicate that it shifts from day to day.  

In their introduction to *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, Robert Corber and Stephen Valocchi define queerness as follows:  

…“queer” names or describes identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexual desire. Such identities and practices have the potential to expose the widely held belief that sex, gender, and sexuality have a causal or necessary relationship to each other as an ideological fiction that works to stabilize heterosexuality. For this reason, queer studies is especially interested in nonnormative forms of identity, or forms in which sex, gender, and sexuality do not line up in the socially prescribed way.  

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5 Butler, “Critically Queer,” 18.  
6 Each of these descriptions is from Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke Univ. Press, 2006), 65.  
7 I adopt this acronym, though the convention varies for which letters to include in the acronym. Some acronyms include ‘Q’ to designate queerness. I opt not to do this, insofar as defining queerness is part of this project itself and I intend it to vary in designation, depending on the context.  
The logic here is that LGBTIA+ individuals are queer insofar as they defy the normative mapping of sex, gender, and sexuality, or what Butler terms the *compulsory order of sex, gender, and desire*. We culturally tend to theorize that sex determines dichotomous genders: males are men and females are women. The causal chain then yields oppositional sexualities in which desire strictly follows from one’s gender. Males/men are masculine and desire females/women; females are feminine and naturally desire males/men. Queer individuals include anyone whom transgresses this ordering. Gay/lesbian individuals are queer insofar as they transgress norms for sexuality; intersexuels challenge the binary of sex; transgender individuals cross gender boundaries; non-binary individuals reject these boundaries altogether; and so on for other queer identities. Thus, in a broader sense, queerness indicates transgressing socially sanctioned ideals of sex, gender, and sexuality. We label a person as a *queer* (n.) insofar as their sex, gender, and/or sexuality do not cohere in the expected way. Put another way, something about a person (group, idea, etc.) is *queer* (adj.) insofar as it is odd, dissonant, unexpected, conventionally taboo.

Consider the reasoning behind this normative mapping. When we talk about norms, we mean one of at least two things. First, we refer to what is normally the case or what tends to happen. This is descriptive, describing how things tend to be, perhaps within a certain range of standard deviation. Normally, women are the ones to buy products such as skirts and makeup. Alternatively, we talk about norms as synonymous with customs or social scripts. They are rules of thumb for how to behave, how to present oneself in certain situations, and what kinds of responses are expected based on certain demands from others. Students raise their hands before

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9 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8; 30-31. This compulsory ordering is true within North American contexts. Other cultures and contexts have their own ordering of sex, gender, and desire/sexuality that differs from this one. For example, some cultures make no distinction between sex and gender. Others rely more heavily on sexual practices to define gender rather than presuming that gender determines one’s sexual desire. Cf. Serena Nanda, *Gender Diversity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2000).
contributing in class discussion; this is a norm of academia. In this prescriptive sense, norms prescribe what individuals should do, how they ought to behave.

Butler explains the dual meaning of normativity:

On the one hand, [normativity] refers to the aims and aspirations that guide us, the precepts by which we are compelled to act or speak to one another, the commonly held presuppositions by which we are oriented, and which give direction to our actions. On the other hand, normativity refers to the process of normalization, the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal “men” and “women.” And in this second sense, we see that norms are what govern “intelligible” life, “real” men and “real” women.”

The first sense in which she writes about normativity is the more descriptive of the two. The aims and aspirations that guide us suggest those means that normally satisfy such aims and aid in achieving one’s aspirations. Note that this already suggests certain prescriptions of how one should behave. Even when we talk of what tends to happen – such as women tend to be the ones who buy skirts – there already exist scripts of normalization that perpetuate that trend. This is the second sense of normativity: that it normalizes, compelling potential deviations to tend more toward the norm lest it be rendered unintelligible or negatively sanctioned.

Butler argues this point in Gender Trouble as well, i.e. that coercive prescriptions often pose as mere descriptions.

The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender – indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another. When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.

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10 Judith Butler, Undoing Gender (New York: Routledge, 2004), 206.

11 Butler, Gender Trouble, 185.
We picture sex, gender, and sexuality mapping onto and/or cohering to one another in a certain way. This is a compulsory order. Not only is it what tends to happen, but we perpetuate this tendency by normalizing it, treating it as natural, and thus preempting the possibility of deviation. This is what Butler means by the “regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence.”

Embodying femininity may signify desire for men or, more specifically, desire of a morphology that includes a penis. Taken as a norm, this purports to simply describe “developmental law,” or how these things tend to develop in relation to one another. Yet when we recognize alternate mappings, this disrupts heteronormativity, the idea that sex, gender, and desire signify and make sense insofar as they bear this certain relation to one another. Thus, the regulatory ideal – thou must be heterosexual – is exposed underneath the proposed descriptive claim of simply standard development.

Queerness stands in relation to normativity in a way analogous to Beauvoir’s account of the relationship between Other and Subject. The Other is defined and determined by its relationship to the Subject, the latter being independent and self-sufficient. Similarly, that which is queer is supposed to be a permutation on that which is normative and, in this sense, we presume to define the queer in reference to normativity. However, just as the Other sets up a reciprocal claim on the Subject,12 so too the queer sets up reciprocity with normativity.

For example, Ann Fausto-Sterling notes that deviations in science help define what is normal and then we ignore that these deviations helped set the relationship.

This is, in fact, one of the very interesting things about biological investigators. They use the infrequent to illuminate the common. The former they call abnormal, the latter normal… Biologists and physicians use natural biological variation to define normality.

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Armed with this description, they set out to eliminate the natural variation that gave them their definitions in the first place.\(^{13}\)

This illustrates how queerness helps delineate normality. It also illustrates how what tends to be the case becomes imposed as the only option. Being born intersex itself poses no health risks to the infant. Yet we see a medical history in which physicians advise parents of intersex babies to surgically determine the child as either male or female. If normalizing surgery does not take place, they advocate, at the very least, that the parents determine as to which gender – still presumed binary, boy or girl – they raise the child.

Queerness and normativity stand in relation to one another such that they contest one another and stand to re-signify one another. We change gender codes, standards of beauty, ideals of professional-wear, dating rituals, and so on. What we take to be queer evolves with these shifting ideas about normative behavior. But also, queer instantiations open possibilities for changing meanings of what is normative. This brings us to the notion of *queering*.

*To queer* (v.) means to make something appear odd or out-of-place. Or, as Martha Humphrey describes, *queering* is “a process of making the normal strange… a distorting, a making the solid unstable.”\(^{14}\) Whereas I describe queerness and normativity as reciprocally dependent, Humphrey describes the dynamic between “solid” and “unstable”:

…to talk about “queerness” is to talk about a relation between something perceived to be solid or stable and its destabilization into something else. The “solid” need not be the “normal” and the something else need not be the “pathologized.” Rather, the solid is the commonly understood, the taken-for-granted in any given context, standing in relation to its distortion… Thus, the “queered” position is related to and dependent upon the stable position, rather than being a separate position itself. It undermines the stability of the primary term and opens up the possibility that the solid has never been solid at all.\(^{15}\)

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15 Ibid.
That which is queer can muddle boundaries, disrupt conceptualization, and destabilize what we previously assumed as fixed or natural.

As Butler describes, the queer is “a site of collective contestation,” a discontinuity with the possibility of re-signification. Insofar as queerness becomes visible in more than an ephemeral or individualistic occurrence, it represents a collective contestation. It is a nagging disturbance of the norm that threatens the stability of that convention. Butler also describes queerness as presenting a “de-formity.” Under current signifying regimes, the queer is not formed ‘correctly’ as to elicit approval or normative sanction. It is ‘perverse’ and ‘deviant.’ In another sense, the queer is a de-formity insofar as it is a formation in process, the coming of new signification. It de-forms the normative by contesting it, unseating it as normal and natural. Thus, that which is queer holds the potential, in its collective, recurring appearances, to amend or nullifying the idea that it is shameful, unlivable, or a perversion. In thus undermining a norm’s prescriptiveness we can then change how the concept is applied and/or re-signify the term. Queerness gains recognition by changing the rules for what we consider recognizable. In this way, the queer *queers*.

The question is whether these myriad definitions of the queer share some commonality or whether we can find something that defines all of them. Certainly, these definitions are interrelated. An oversimplified version might claim that they all share the root of being odd, abnormal or non-normative. I am partial to the definition that the queer (n/adj.) is that which is odd or deviant in such a way that it offers the possibility to *queer* (v) or to be a catalyst for change. But is this too expansive of a definition? Does it lose some of its descriptiveness?

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16 Butler, “Critically Queer,” in *GLQ*, vol. 1, 19.
1.2 The Performative Self

Having provisionally defined queerness, we now can consider what notion of selfhood accommodates queerness’ multiple senses. Insofar as I am following a pragmatic methodology, I will canvas what I take to be the most challenging problems in articulating a queer subjectivity. A prominent model within queer theory itself is Butler’s *performative self*; it is also a primary point of contention for critics of queer theory. My analysis will include an evaluation of this model of selfhood for its efficacy in doing justice to LGBTIA+ lives. As such, let us first explicate performativity.

A performative is an action that is self-creating. Uttering “I promise” cites the institution or social code of creating a bond in which one person ensures something in the future. Additionally, the utterance creates the individual promise and perpetuates the institution of promise-making. The performative realizes – makes real – that which it performs. The social code is tied up in the utterance; the promise itself does not lie in the fulfillment, but in the speaker and the audience both affirming the social script in play. My promise relies on you being familiar with the practice of promise-making, of believing in its efficacy, and having faith in my authenticity. My promise-making relies on and cites all of this, but it is the action itself that reifies promise-making as a social institution.

Let us quickly avoid conflating performativity with play-acting, theatricality, or showmanship. Granted, we do perform in the sense of gesturing and vocalizing things in relation with our surroundings. We take ourselves to convey certain things by these performances. However, this sense of performance does not mean that we play at something that we are not – though we can – and it does not mean that it is an artifice in the sense that it is opposed to and/or concealing some more fundamental ‘reality.’
For Butler, there is no ‘fundamental reality.’ Such a notion is itself an artifice of what Nietzsche terms a metaphysics of substance. Butler explains this as “the belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality of substance and attribute.” Rather, there is nothing prior to discourse that frames these actions/performances; we inescapably relate to one another within operative norms and conventions. We are enmeshed in, embodied in, and reliant on these structures. Discourse includes that which is sanctioned, such as what is appropriate for what context or for what body. It also includes what is off-limits to say or do. These sanctions structure not only how we interact with one another and our surroundings, but they create and affect the contours of ourselves and our surroundings. Within a metaphysics of substance, we understand the self — and gender, inseparable as they are — as performatively, “constituting the identity it is purported to be.”

Language is already in play that renders individuals’ performatives meaningful. In “Doing Justice to Someone,” Butler writes:

…”we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves… [When] one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before.”

When we give birth to a new person — in reality, in conception/thought, in fiction — we unavoidably frame them within certain ideas of what it means to be human and/or a person. This includes a coterie of gender assumptions: that the person will interact with others in a certain way; that these actions will indicate certain things about who they are; that they will look a certain way; that this will tell us how to interact with them. To be human entails some readable gender or, rather, that others inevitably read you as a certain gender and engage/respond

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19 Ibid., 34.
accordingly. It involves a morphology that implicates a sex that is treatable and diagnosable within the medical community. It includes, as well, a sense of what preferences and actions tend to frame your sexuality. Such norms, assumptions, codes, and habituated behaviors constitute language, broadly construed. They are all signals – somatic as well as verbal – for how to read things, how to comprehend them, and how to engage with our surroundings based upon them.

Return, now, to the point that performativity is not theatricality. Such performance is not one that presents an artifice that occludes and obscures what is really going on. It is not a falsity; it is not mere play or merely putting on a persona if by that we mean that it covers over some underlying truth. To say that the self is performative does entail that it is a play of norms, it is in a sense putting on a persona. Butler’s point is that this is precisely what it means to be persons and to construct an intelligible sense of self. We take up norms, embody them, and realize them; we make them real within our bodies, our actions, structuring our environments and ourselves in their terms.

This further means that the self is perpetually becoming, (re-)creating itself through its performances of self. As Beauvoir writes in the introduction to The Second Sex, “the scope of the verb to be must be understood; bad faith means giving it a substantive value, when in fact it has the sense of the Hegelian dynamic: to be is to have become, to have been made as one manifests oneself.”21 We become that which we take ourselves to be. Butler explains Beauvoir on this point: “Gender is not only a cultural construction imposed upon identity, but in some sense gender is a process of constructing ourselves.”22 We understand ideas and expectations about what our bodies, how they are to act, what our morphology is meant to embody within the world.

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21 Beauvoir, introduction to The Second Sex, 12.
To the extent that we take these expectations to be of *our* bodies, we take them to be personal strictures and we thus reify them in our actions.

Yet, in a norm’s embodiment, its signification gets personalized. As intersectionality emphasizes, each individual stands in unique relation to a complex matrix of norms that regulate race, ethnicity, nationality, ability/disability, age, class, sex, gender, and so on. I instantiate and negotiate these norms and the incumbent expectations placed on my body, my personhood. I embody norms of femininity in relation with other norms and significations that I currently embody. As a result, these norms’ significations take on a different hue. This is what Butler means when she talks of speaking a language “in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before.”\footnote{Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 69.} Butler describes this as a failure to repeat the norm insofar as we never absolutely replicate ideals such as femininity and/or masculinity. Herein lies the possibility for queering. In “speaking a language” in a way not yet spoken, we open new possibilities of utilizing language; its particular embodiments illustrate new significations for a language.

Nonetheless, this does *not* mean that the construction of self is arbitrary, voluntary, or changeable at will. I do not arbitrarily decide myself if by this we mean that I individually determine myself irrespective of my surroundings, culture, and upbringing. We are constrained by the language of norms already functioning and framing our environment. Gender is “a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint.”\footnote{Ibid., 1.} What we take to be viable expressions of personhood and gender are socially sanctioned; social norms frame what we conceive as possible and determine what others take to be meaningful. Similarly, my gendered personhood is not entirely voluntary. I am in a situation not entirely of my choosing; I do not construct my parentage, cultural milieu, and social norms into which I am born. These are part of the language

\footnote{Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 69.}
\footnote{Ibid., 1.}
“already going on.” I am not the signatory of what norms are in play in any situation, nor am I wholly in control of what background assumptions and perceptions others bring to perceiving my actions, myself.

On the other hand, to say that the gendered self is not entirely voluntary does not preclude a notion of agency. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler writes:

If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom in this struggle [with conditions of one’s own life that one could not have chosen], it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint… Its struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as one must produce oneself in some way. This struggle with the unchosen conditions of one’s life [is agency]…

Agency involves responding to the struggle of dealing with the frame of constraint one did not choose. What constrains – and enables – the subject is the language in play, including the rules of gender a subject reifies as they instantiate them in their actions. We do not choose the social milieu in which we are cast and yet we grapple with how to enact our subjectivity within this milieu to render ourselves intelligible and recognizable to others. Though we are constrained/enabled by established discourses, we are not thereby wholly determined by them.

1.3 Objections and Challenges

Though performativity is a leading paradigm of selfhood in queer theory, critics abound in challenging its ability to adequately represent the diversity of its purported constituents. Various, occasionally conflicting, criticisms object that queer theory homogenizes the image of queerness as male homosexuality; devalues the accomplishments of gay and lesbian studies; and mischaracterizes the experiences of trans individuals. The remainder of this chapter considers four classes of objections and/or problems salient to developing a notion of queer selfhood.

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Taken together, these challenges suggest that queer theory has yet to formulate a viable notion of queer subjectivity.

1. Destabilizing the Subject

In “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?,” David Eng et. al. identify queer theory’s “subjectless critique” as one of its primary characteristics. Further, Eng characterizes this as a strength, “that queer has no fixed political referent.” Taken in its most charitable reading, this means that whom queer theory seeks to speak for is adaptable to what political assumptions and power relations are in play. In the opening pages of *Gender Trouble*, Butler employs Foucault to explain that “juridical systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent.” A few lines later, Butler writes: “…the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation.”

Regarding the queer subject then, we might likewise say that we constitute – determine, define, delineate – queer subjects in the very process by which we seek to gain representation for them. We define the queer subject by what institutions and norms we appeal to, what conceptions we bring to discourse and, just as importantly, what we exclude.

Yet, one of the most common critiques of postmodernism’s “subjectless” epistemology is that it leaves no vantage from which concrete subjects/selves can speak as queer. In “Dilemmas of Difference,” Christine Di Stefano surveys feminist authors that voice this critique of postmodernism. First, Di Stefano references Nancy Harstock:

Why is it, just at the moment in Western history when previously silenced populations have begun to speak for themselves and on behalf of their subjectivities, that the concept

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27 Ibid.
of the subject and the possibility of discovering/creating a liberating “truth” become suspect?\textsuperscript{29}

Though Di Stefano writes within the context of feminist postmodern epistemologies, this critique extends to denying queer subjectivities as well. Insofar as queer theory seeks political representation for queer individuals, there must be some way of talking about those whom we wish to represent and do justice to. A few lines later, Di Stefano explains a similar critique from Jane Flax: “the postmodernist suspicion of the subject effectively prohibits the exploration of (a repressed) subjectivity by and on behalf of women.”\textsuperscript{30} Finally, by way of summing up this line of critique, Di Stefano adds

To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.\textsuperscript{31}

Let us be clear about the argument here. Di Stefano identifies feminism as a politics whose subject is women and whose aims include women-centered inquiry. She characterizes postmodernism as disallowing any subject-centered inquiry. Thus, Di Stefano concludes that postmodernism is at cross-purposes with feminist aims.

I have two responses to this argument. First, queer theory is not alone in interrogating what constitutes a woman, what the conditions are under which one becomes a woman, and how we recognize and represent women (or any other gender). One of the main critiques of third wave feminism is that feminisms before were not speaking to the range of diversity of women. In “Have We Got a Theory for You,” Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman illustrate how the claim that women’s voices have been silenced may include racist and classist assumptions.

\textsuperscript{29} Di Stefano, “Dilemmas of Difference,” 75.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 76.
Identifying her own white/Anglo voice, Spelman writes: “The complaint does not specify which women have been silenced… [It] suggests that it is women as women who have been silenced, and that whether a woman is rich or poor, Black, brown or white, etc. is irrelevant to what it means for her to be a woman.” Lugones and Spelman indicate two problems with this. First, it ignores the intersecting power dynamics that render certain groups of women more vulnerable than others based on other aspects of their identity (race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.). Second, such differential power dynamics render some women’s voices more willing and/or audible than others. Thus, the authors note that feminist theorizing most often develops in relation to subjects who are white, middle-class, and heterosexual.

bell hooks similarly charges feminist critiques as being “one-dimensional perspective[s] on women’s reality.” She begins Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center by noting that “Feminism in the United States has never emerged from the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually - women who are powerless to change their condition in life.” In particular, black women’s voices are systematically marginalized by the dual oppressions of sexism and racism. Black women “[have] not been socialized to assume to role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized ‘other’ that we can exploit or oppress.” To use Di Stefano’s term, Black women are often marginalized or excluded altogether from the “feminist constituency.”

32 Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You!,” in Women’s Studies International Forum, v. 6, no. 6 (1983), 574.
33 bell hooks, Feminist Theory, 3.
34 Ibid., 1.
35 Ibid., 16.
Audre Lorde offers the refrain that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Part of her argument is that white feminists often vied for their place as subjects by othering groups of women in similar ways to how men systematically other women. As Lorde illustrates, this is itself an instance of challenging denials of subjectivity without also challenging the framework for granting subjectivity.

Di Stefano might offer the rejoinder that these critics differ from queer theory in that the former challenge the operative notion of the woman subject whereas the latter contests the notion of subjectivity altogether. However, hooks does call for redefinition of subjectivity itself, though she does not write as a queer theorist. She condemns the notion of subjecthood defined as atomistic, competitive, and predicated on what she terms an “ideology of domination.” This ideology claims that one must dominate another in order to claim power and/or liberation for oneself. Insofar as hooks defines feminism as “a struggle to end sexist oppression… [and] the ideology of domination,” conceiving of subjectivity in this way “undermines the potential radicalism of feminist struggle.”

My second response to this objection is that to contest the notion of subjectivity does not entail ridding ourselves of the concept altogether. This conflates queer theory’s deconstruction of the subject with a complete dismissal of the subject. Butler repeatedly cautions against such misreadings:

… to deconstruct the subject is not to negate or throw away the concept; on the contrary, deconstruction implies only that we suspend all commitments to that to which the term, ‘the subject,’ refers, and that we consider the linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority. To deconstruct is not to negate or to dismiss,

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38 Ibid., 9.
but to call into question and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term, like the subject, to a reusage or redeployment that previously has not been authorized.\(^39\)

Queer theory denies any fixed referent and/or conceptualization of the subjects for whom it seeks to do justice. It leaves open both questions: what persons are included in its constituency and what constitutes a person. Butler identifies it as part of doing justice to queer subjects that the answers to these questions remain revisable. Yet we can define the subject in some provisional, functional sense. As already identified and defined above, the leading paradigm of self in queer theory is Butler’s performative self. This subject is fragmented, at times incoherent and indeterminate, dynamic and evolving. In its evolution and re-significations, it contests normative assumptions about the subject.

If the objection is that queer theory cannot speak of queer subjects because it renders subjectivity “suspect,” then I rebut this claim by re-affirming that queer theory does have a notion of subjectivity. However, the heart of Di Stefano’s critique remains if we read it as claiming that the queer self is decentered in such a way that renders it difficult to represent and/or recognize. Decentering the subject does not well-serve the political agenda of gaining recognition for it. This leads us to a consideration of our other three objections, which each claim that queer theory misrepresents subjects in some sense.

2. Narrow Focus on Sexuality

Our second objection alleges that queer theory (i) centers its critiques primarily or exclusively on issues of sexuality and thus (ii) occludes LGBTIA+ individuals’ experiences that do not fit within this narrow scope. In Nomadic Subjects, Rosi Braidotti offers two such critiques

of Butler’s work. First, Braidotti argues that Butler relies on a “transsexual paradigm”\(^{40}\) that is culture-specific and thus limited. I will parse this claim into two parts. First, by “transsexual paradigm,” I take Braidotti to be referring to Butler’s use of transsexuality as an example of queerness. That is, she accuses Butler of fallaciously identifying all cases of transsexuality as defying/disrupting heteronormativity and the compulsory ordering of sex, gender, and desire. I will respond to this charge in conjunction with our fourth class of objections, which is dedicated to trans experiences.

The second component of Braidotti’s claim is that queer theory’s reading of sexuality (vis-à-vis Butler) does not track through the European genealogy of feminism. In the tradition of Luce Irigaray, Braidotti is committed to some defined sexual difference between men and women whereas she identifies a tendency in American feminism – and in Butler in particular – to move ‘beyond’ these distinctions. Thus, Braidotti differentiates the Anglo-American tradition’s “gender theorist,” who employ the sex/gender distinction, from the French and Continental tradition’s “sexual difference theorists” for whom the notion of gender “bears little or no relevance.”\(^{41}\)

The caution towards cultural sensitivity is well-taken. There is no cross-cultural agreement on how sex, gender, and sexuality map onto one another, much less on what specific norms constitute each. In _Cultural Diversity_ Serena Nanda provides an ethnography of several cultures in which the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality varies from our own. For example, she discusses certain Brazilian cultures which have two sexes/genders – “man” and “not-man” – that are determined by sexuality, or rather, the position taken during penile penetration. Men are those who penetrate their partner; not-men are those who are penetrated,


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 142.
regardless of whether they are ‘male-’ or ‘female-’ bodied. Such mappings destabilize any presumption to the naturalness or necessity of sex determining gender and sexuality. They also provide additional representations that diversify our understanding of queerness.

However, my conception of queerness does not rely on a distinction between sex and gender; nor does it presume that queerness follows from deviancy in sexuality alone. This seems to be part of Braidotti’s concern in leveling the charge of cultural specificity at Butler’s framework. I grant that Butler’s focus in Gender Trouble is primarily on how heterosexuality structures our notions of sex and gender; I grant also that her project culminates in proposing ways that we may transgress and supplant this compulsory ordering. However, Butler’s framework does allow for our more expansive understanding of queerness not seated in sexuality alone. If she does not herself extend her reading into other cultures/contexts, this does not entail that the framework is unable to do so. Further, while Butler includes examples of transsexuals and discusses the queerness of these cases at length, she also considers individuals who are intersex, practice drag, and elude easy identification altogether. Hence, Braidotti oversimplifies Butler’s work by branding it a ‘transsexual paradigm.’

Braidotti’s second criticism is that Butler emphasizes heterosexuality as “the matrix of power” and thus oversimplifies the ways in which dominance and oppression play at many registers of society. Braidotti explains: “Power relations cannot be reduced to compulsory heterosexuality only. Power has no matrix; it is not a centralized notion, but rather a weblike pervasive situation of controls and regulations.” If Butler, indeed, claimed that sexuality is the matrix of power, then Braidotti is right in pointing out this obvious oversimplification. Power operates not only in sexual dynamics, but within other registers of identity such as race, class,

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42 Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects, 291.
religion, nationality, education, and so on. We cannot separate these from one another in how we experience the world, though we may say that some of them are more salient in certain circumstances than others. We see this in hooks’ discussion of how black women experience sexual oppression differently than white women. Within a singular experience, we cannot separate the sexual dynamics from the racial ones.

However, it is a flat-footed reading of Butler to argue that she interprets all power dynamics through this lens of hegemonic heterosexuality. One of the first lessons on Butler that I convey to introductory students is that we cannot think persons without already gendering and sexualizing them. In “Doing Justice to Someone,” Butler defines justice as including decisions about what a person is, and what social norms must be honored and expressed for “personhood” to become allocated, how we do or do not recognize animate others as persons depending on whether or not we recognize a certain norm manifested in and by the body of that other.43

Our concept of personhood already demands that a recognizable gender norm be manifest in the person. To the extent that we cannot easily read someone as fitting into a gender – specifically, as either man or woman, boy or girl – their personhood becomes suspect. Reading this passage, I encourage students to think about those ways in which we habitually and subconsciously read gender and presume a correlative underlying sex upon our first interactions with any individual.

Consider, as well, this passage from Gender Trouble:

It would be wrong to think that the discussion of “identity” ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that “persons” only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility.44

The hasty conclusion that some students make is that Butler intends to theorize gender and sexuality prior to any other norms through which we render personhood. This parallels

44 Butler, Gender Trouble, 22.
Braidotti’s claim that Butler prioritizes sexuality as the matrix of power. Granted, it is not within the scope of Butler’s project within *Gender Trouble* to discuss how the coterie of other norms (race, class, nationality, education, etc.) concurrently play in how we recognize and render others intelligible. However, this does not entail that her theory cannot extend to these other power dynamics. We may similarly point to racial norms that render persons intelligible, or the default assumptions we make about others’ education when we listen to their elocution. Though it does not undermine Butler’s framework, Braidotti is correct in arguing that we must account for those ways in which queerness appears within these web-like relations of subjectivity, including race and so on.

Susan Stryker offers a third objection to queer theory’s supposed focus on sexuality. Writing as a trans woman herself, Stryker argues that queer theory misrepresents trans lives as deviating from normative sexuality.\(^45\) In “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,”\(^46\) Stryker writes:

> While queer theory studies remains the most hospitable place to undertake transgender work, all too often *queer* remains a code word for “gay” or “lesbian,” and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity.\(^46\)

There are two interrelated critiques here. First, Stryker notes that ‘queer’ often refers more narrowly to gay and lesbian experiences and thus does not operate as inclusively as it intends. Second, she argues that transsexuality is wrongly read in parallel to homosexuality as being an issue of sexuality. This misrepresents trans experiences insofar as identifying as trans is a matter of *gender* rather than sexuality. Put differently, trans individuals disrupt heteronormativity in that

\(^45\) This objection fits within the fourth category of objections as well insofar as it is about misrepresenting trans experiences. However, I present it here insofar as it centers on the claim that queer theory focuses solely on challenging notions of sexuality.

their gender deviates from the compulsory order. Thus, Stryker objects to queer theory insofar as its supposed focus on sexuality fails to recognize a key component of the trans identity.

However, this objection as well censures a narrow version of queer theory that does not meet my own conception. I define as queer any of the ways in which individuals vary from the compulsory order; I have already defined trans lives as queering norms of gender. Further, Butler herself objects to the hasty identification of queer theory exclusively with concerns of sexuality. To the extent that theorists limit themselves to understanding queerness in relation to sexuality alone, I agree that this equation is too narrow. However, the conception of queer theory that frames this project guards against such exclusivity. I will return to this point in later chapters to test whether my proposed concept of the queer self satisfies these objections.

3. Identifications

Queer theory has a fraught relationship with identity claims. Advocates of identity politics take some identity as the starting point for theorizing the lives of those it categorizes and the rallying point for solidarity and/or political activism. Theorists often depict queer theory in stark opposition to identity politics insofar as it challenges identity claims. The objection is this: If queer theory denies all identity claims, then this poses a problem for representing groups who rally around such specific identifications, such as gay and lesbian studies, transgender studies, and intersex activism. Further, it potentially devalues and alienates such groups insofar as they rely on claims to a certain identity.

In “Normalization of Queer Theory,” David Halperin suggests that as queer theory becomes the norm in academia, it devalues what ground is gained through gay and lesbian studies. Terming this the “hegemony of queer theory,” Halperin cautions that it has “the

misleading effect of portraying all previous work in lesbian and gay studies as under-theorized, as laboring under the delusion of identity politics…” Part of the implication is that queer theory masquerades as liberating critique, as dismantling oppressive structures of dominance. Rather, Halperin concludes that it instantiates itself as the dominant mode of critique by subjugating forms of critique that come from gay and lesbian studies.

Sheila Jeffreys offers a similar critique in “The Queer Disappearance of Lesbians.” In her reading of queer theory, “there is no recognition of the specificity of lesbian experience.” Though queer theory purports to challenge identity claims, Jeffreys argues that it privileges the narratives of queer men by focusing on gay culture. In particular, Jeffreys critiques championing camp and drag on the grounds that both practices serve to reify male power. Citing Kate Davy, Jeffreys explains: “what matters about male crossdressers is that there is a male underneath.” The performances purport to be celebrations of femininity and/or playing with gender identifications. Yet, Jeffreys argues that this play happens most visibly because of the authority of the male body underneath the performances.

Certainly, gay and lesbian histories deserve their own platform(s) for being studied, for having their voices heard, and for addressing issues that develop from their lives. However, I do not see these projects as necessarily inimical to queer theory. Butler herself notes that these movements – queer theory, gay and lesbian studies, transgender and intersex activism – share the task of

   distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love, and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself. Sometimes norms function both ways at once, and sometimes they function one way for a given group, and another way for another group.\footnote{Butler, \textit{Undoing Gender}, 8.}

\footnote{Halperin, “The Normalization of Queer Theory,” 341.}
\footnote{Jeffreys, “The Queer Disappearance of Lesbians,” 459.}
\footnote{Ibid., 464.}
I am not concerned with advocating for the discreteness and/or superiority of queer theory as a field. Rather, my concern is advocating for the various individuals who embody queerness in one form or another. Simon Watney beautifully articulates this difficult negotiation in theorizing queerness:

‘Queer’ is certainly not going to go away, but nor I think is it going to take the place of earlier classifications and identities in any absolute sense. On the contrary, ‘queer’ identity recognizes that no single term, including ‘queer’, can ever resolve all the epistemological and political problems that are inscribed within the current dominant rationality of sexuality and sexual identities.52

I do not conceive of queerness as an all-encompassing term which derides and excludes more definite identifications. I also understand its potential in fostering commonalities in difference. Nonetheless, the point is well-taken that we need to find a way for queer theory to justly address the specificity and discreteness of its constituents while building these alliances.

Further, Butler addresses the tension between queer theory and identity claims in her introductory chapter of *Undoing Gender*:

If queer theory is understood, by definition, to oppose all identity claims, including stable sex assignment, then the tension seems strong indeed. But I would suggest that more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity or indeed its retrograde status is queer theory’s claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity.53

Queer theory emphasizes the plasticity of identity. That is, identity claims are not absolute. They are always deferred and never complete, insofar as they are performatively constituted, contested, undone, and reconstructed. That identity claims have retrograde status means that we claim them after the fact. My identification with certain characteristics is a product of my (embodied) performance of them. I take them to be indicative of myself and in so doing, I live and thus perpetuate the identification.

The purpose of queer theory is not to challenge identity claims to the end of ridding ourselves of identity claims altogether. Claiming as much repeats the conflation of deconstruction with dissolution. Rather, Butler emphasizes queer theory’s opposition to the “unwanted legislation of identity.” In “To(o) Queer the Writer,” Gloria Anzaldúa writes: “Identity is not a bunch of little cubbyholes stuffed respectively with intellect, race, sex, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river—a process. Contained within the river is its identity, and it needs to flow, to change to stay a river…”\textsuperscript{54}

Queer theory utilizes identifications to the extent that we recognize them as plastic, provisional, and/or dynamic. Butler describes queer critique as

\begin{quote}
\text{an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation.}\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

If identity entails an ontologically prior subject, then queer theory denies identity claims. If we assume that identifications are static rather than plastic and evolving, then it denies such identifications of the subject as well. Understanding personhood as having such fixed referents is an iteration of the problem of imposing theory onto lived experiences instead of formulating theory out of an in response to these experiences.

\section{Trans Experiences}

The last class of challenges charge that queer theory misrepresents trans experiences in some significant way, often by misconstruing the role and significance of the body in trans narratives. Within this class of objections, I find three particularly salient criticisms: [1] that trans


\textsuperscript{55} Butler, \textit{Undoing Gender}, 4.
individuals identify with one sex and thus re-instantiate rather than disrupt the binary; [2] that queer theory at least undervalues and at most ignores the role that the body plays in how we experience and understand ourselves; and [3] that Butler’s theory of performativity ignores the experiences of individuals whose sex/gender/sexuality identifications do not match their performances. Insofar as these critiques are interrelated, I first will explain what motivates each objection and then offer some preliminary responses.

Braidotti rejects Butler’s “transsexual paradigm” of queerness by arguing that transsexuals identify as strictly male or female, thus affirming the sex/gender binary rather than destabilizing or queering it. Braidotti writes:

…most of the research I have read on this shows that transsexual people long for sexual clarity and want to belong unequivocally to the pole of the gender binary they recognize as affirming their identity. This means that the idea of sexual indeterminacy as a paradigm actually disregards the desires of real-life transsexuals…

Whereas Butler argues that transgender cases contest the multiple relations between sex, gender, and desire, Braidotti counters that trans individuals want clear identification with one sex/gender and thus do not contest these norms.

Jay Prosser articulates the second and third objections within this class. The second objection is that queer theory does not take seriously the body or, as Prosser articulates it, it is incapable of “[sustaining] the body as a literal category.” Because queer theory overemphasizes the role of language in constructing the body, it underestimates the significance of categories of sex and the materiality of the body in trans narratives. Whereas Butler portrays transsexuality as transgressing the categories of sex, gender, and sexuality, Prosser counters: “In transsexuality sex returns, the queer repressed, to unsettle its theory of gender performativity.” What I take

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57 Prosser, “Judith Butler…” in Stryker, 261.
58 Ibid.
Prosser to mean by “sex returns” is that the specific materiality and morphology of the body comes into question because trans individuals experience a disconnect not only between their self-identified gender and the language, conceptualizations, expectations, and treatment associated with their body. Rather, there is a very bodily experience of disjunction between gender identification and body. The disconnect is felt rather than articulated.

Prosser also contends: “Gender Trouble cannot account for a transsexual desire for sexed embodiment as telos.” An implication here is that all trans lives are defined by the desire to alter one’s morphology to obtain biological indicators of another sex. Prosser elaborates:

…there are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constative, quite simply, to be. What gets dropped from transgender in its queer deployment to signify subversive gender performativity is the value of the matter that often most concerns the transsexual: the narrative of becoming a biological man or a biological woman (as opposed to the performative of effecting one) – in brief and simple the materiality of the sexed body.

With its emphasis on acts, gestures, and other inscriptions of discourse, Butler’s notion of performativity underplays the significance of the materiality of the body in trans experiences. Prosser understands queer theory as theorizing the body merely as “sex as discursive effect” and “the body as visual surface.” Yet, for many transgender individuals, altering outward signification of the body (such as through clothing or other apparent effects) is not sufficient. Inscribing the body differently within the surrounding discourse does not satisfy the trans desire to be another sex. Thus, Prosser concludes that trans experiences undermine Butler’s notion of performativity rather than support it.

59 Prosser, “Judith Butler…” in Stryker, 265.
60 Ibid., 264.
61 Ibid., 265.
62 Ibid., 271.
Further, Prosser interprets performativity as claiming that there is no sense of self besides the one visibly performed and embodied. Given this understanding, he objects that Butler cannot accommodate trans individuals’ experiences of knowing themselves to be a sex/gender at odds with their apparent performative selves. Prosser writes:

The transsexual doesn’t necessarily look differently gendered but by definition feels differently gendered from her or his birth-assigned sex. In both its medical and its autobiographical versions, the transsexual narrative depends upon an initial crediting of this feeling as generative ground. It demands some recognition of the category of corporeal interiority (internal bodily sensations) and of its distinctiveness from that which can be seen (external surface): the difference between gender identity and sex that serves as the logic of transsexuality.  

Here Prosser indicates that the theory of performativity does away with anything but appearance, or what is readable on the surface of the body. In contrast, transsexual experiences are defined by a felt at-oddness between external appearance – what is performed – and internal phenomenological experience of the self, or something that exceeds the performance and is at odds with the performance. If the repeated acts of gender are all that gender is, then this cannot account for transgender individuals’ dissonance between mind and body, gender identification and gender expression.

In response to these objections, I first counter that not all transgender individuals desire to alter their morphologies. Contrary to Braidotti’s claim, not all transsexuals desire clear identification within the sex/gender binary. Or, using Prosser’s language, having a telos of altering one’s sexed embodiment is not a necessary condition for identifying as trans. Granted, there are transgender writers that affirm the gender binary. However, there are also transgender writers who speak against it. Kate Bornstein recounts her experience of coming out as transgendered in Gender Outlaw. One of the main arguments of the book criticizes the social

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compulsion for individuals to identify as man or woman. Not only does Bornstein disavow this system based on personal experience, but she also explains why transsexuals have much motivation to maintain/reify the binary. “The correct target for any successful transsexual rebellion would be the gender system itself. But transsexuals won’t attack that system until they themselves are free of the need to participate in it.” Further: “Through it’s [sic] insistence and fierce maintenance of the man/woman dichotomy, the culture puts the pre-change transsexual in the position of needing to say a permanent good-bye to one gender, and then and only then say hello to another.”

To supplement and complicate this standpoint, I offer Sandy Stone’s “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto.” Also writing as a trans woman, Stone examines trans narratives with the purpose of revealing ways in which “the image and the real mutually define each other.” The predominant schema of understanding trans identification is being born in the wrong body. This claim indicates that the individual desires to transition from one sex/gender — neatly aligned — to the other sex/gender, dichotomously opposed. Thus, such a narrative cleanly separates a pre-operative identity and a post-operative identity.

However, Stone accounts for ways in which trans narratives are compelled into certain expected schemas to legitimate their identities as trans and justify, for example, transitional surgeries. Stone grants that trans narratives often support the common theory noted above:

All these authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: Dress, makeup, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood. Each of these adventurers

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64 Bornstein is not the only trans theorist who challenges binary identifications based on personal experiences. Cf. Halberstam, Female Masculinity; Leslie Feinberg, Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin.”

65 Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw, revised ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 106.

66 Bornstein, Gender Outlaw, 153.

passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other… No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, I’m suspicious."  

Yet, Stone continues to demystify the ways in which gender theorists set certain schemas and scripts for identifying, accepting, and authenticating trans individuals. Stone notes that Harry Benjamin’s *The Transsexual Phenomenon* became the “definitive work” in theorizing trans experiences.

It took a surprisingly long time -- several years -- for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates’ behavioral profiles matched Benjamin’s so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin’s book… and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery.  

Thus, Stone provides an alternative account for why trans experiences continue to reify the “born in the wrong body” hypothesis: fitting this narrative was how they proved to authorities — who themselves could not sympathize with experiences of being trans — that they rightly understood themselves as trans rather than being simply mistaken or suffering from some psychological malady.

Stone offers the following summation of why we do not have alternative discourses to theorize trans narratives:

...[It] is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programmed to disappear. The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase h/erself, to fade into the “normal” population as soon as possible… What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost is the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience, and thereby is lost that aspect of “nature” which Donna Haraway theorizes as Coyote -- the Native American spirit animal who represents the power of continual transformation which is the heart of engaged life.  

Like Bornstein (discussed above), Stone suggests that transformation is endemic to *all* individuals’ journeys of accounting for themselves. Yet, insofar as the dominant discourse of

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69 Ibid., 228.  
70 Ibid., 230.
personhood requires a coherent notion of gender, self-accounts need to include an account of passing from a “false” representation of gender to one’s “true” gender.

Stone argues that a telos of bodily transformation defines trans narratives because, unsurprisingly, the ultimate signifier of one’s sex/gender is the presence (or absence) of the penis. Stone sardonically describes the penis as the “mysterium tremendum” and “physical locus” of maleness or male subjectivity. Insofar as one’s legitimacy as a certain gender depends upon a correlative body-type, this reinforces the need for trans individuals to identify with the “born in the wrong body” narrative. Stone quotes Judith Shapiro: “To those… who might be inclined to diagnose the transsexual’s focus on the genitals as obsessive or fetishistic, the response is that they are, in fact, simply conforming to their culture’s criteria for gender assignment.” In other words, a primary factor that creates a transsexual’s need to alter their body is the cultural conviction that one’s gender expression matches their physical morphology.

There are a few methodological points to emphasize here. First, Stone discusses narratives written by trans individuals, meaning she theorizes from first-person accounts. Second, she writes and theorizes as a trans woman herself, meaning that the resultant theorizing is from ‘within’ a perspective that is itself framed by experiences of being trans. Finally, neither Stone’s aim nor my own is to argue that trans individuals provide false testimony or misunderstand their own experiences. This would, indeed, disregard their personal accounts and impose theory out of touch with these experiences. Rather, the point is that trans individuals’ experiences and choices occur within and in relation to a social situation that includes a compulsory ordering of sex, gender, and desire. Insofar as they experience a dissonance between

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71 The tremendous mystery or the key to explaining.
73 Ibid., 231.
these three registers of self, they might choose to resolve this dissonance by transitioning to an alternate sex, thus identifying as transsexual, or they might choose to live with the dissonance by identifying as transgender without any desire to alter their sex. In either case, what defines the narrative as trans is that it transgresses the normative alignment of sex and gender.

My second response to this class of objections is that, even if critics such as Braidotti are right, that transgender individuals desire unequivocal identification with one side of the gender binary, such cases allow us to more clearly articulate how such a choice and identification occurs. Jack Halberstam argues that “…far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.”74 Marjorie Garber also argues this point in “Spare Parts”:

…these apparently marginal or aberrant cases, that of the transvestite and the transsexual, both define and problematize the entire concept of “male subjectivity.” It is by looking at them, and at the cultural gaze that both constructs and regards them, that we can best test out the viability of the term.75

Trans cases throw into relief how sex/gender norms function insofar as they problematize the notion of what legitimizes someone as a certain sex.

My third response is that, to the extent that Prosser identifies transgender cases with a telos of bodily alteration, he reifies the notion that the possession of an identifiable penis or vagina legitimates one’s sex/gender identity. Fair enough, sex “returns” in Prosser’s definition of trans experiences if they necessarily center around such a telos. However, like the term queer, trans can mean several things. It can identify the desire to alter one’s morphology. More broadly, trans can name any individual who identifies with a gender other than the one they are prescribed at birth. This definition of trans uncouples gender from a necessary correlation to sex. Most

74 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, 1.
75 Garber, “Spare Parts,” 325.
generally, Susan Stryker defines trans as “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place.” This last definition fits quite well with my own definition of queerness as that which problematizes with the possibility of resignification.

Further, Butler responds to the charge that queer theory too easily dismisses the materiality of the body. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes:

> Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language. This is not because I think that the body is reducible to language; it is not. Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts. The body is that upon which language falters, and the body carries its own signs, its own signifiers, in ways that remain largely unconscious.

We cannot separate the body from the discourse through which we understand it, read it, and live it. There exists an irrevocable dialectic between the materiality of the body and discourse on the body. Though Butler’s emphasis is the extent to which discourse shapes the materiality of the body, this does not foreclose recognizing that the relationship is mutual. Whatever language inscribes the body also falters in its inscription.

Nonetheless, I find Prosser’s criticism that queer theory fails to account for the material significance of the body (or does so inadequately) to be the most challenging of these objections. Consider Butler’s description of performativity:

> acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

Within this passage, Butler places much emphasis on the surface of the body and how discourse fabricates “the organizing principle of identity as a cause.” If performativity plays out on the

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77 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 198.
surface of the body and if the self is performative, then it becomes difficult to see how we account for individuals’ claims to a self in dissidence with these performances and/or at odds with their bodies. In this sense, the body becomes a recalcitrant question for queer theory. In accounting for the myriad embodiments of queerness, we must consider the extent to which gender and/or the self exceeds the body and to what extent these rely upon the body.

Let us take stock of the theoretical ground covered thus far. The purpose of this chapter was to inquire into the subject of queer theory in two senses. First, I sought to define who it is that we are talking about when we speak of queer subjects, persons, or individuals. To that end, I delineated the various definitions of queer and considered whether there was a common undercurrent connecting them. Throughout the remainder of this project, queer describes an idea, person, action (and so on) that problematizes norms of gender, sex, sexuality, and other interrelated registers we take to constitute personhood or self. My intention in defining queerness in this way is to recognize the history of systematic marginalization of queer identities, but also to recognize their creative and reorienting force.

Second, I sought to define what it is we mean when we refer to subjects or the concept of subjectivity within a queer context. I outlined Butler’s framework of the performative self. I then considered the most intractable objections to this notion of self and queer theory in general. As part of this discussion, I distinguished objections based on misreadings of queer theory from those that deserve further attention. Moving forward, my purpose is to supplement rather than supplant Butler’s own defenses against or responses to these challenges. Rather, I will offer a pragmatic methodology for constructing a notion of self that recognizes queer embodiments.
CHAPTER 2 . THE SOCIAL SELF

...[C]onceptions, theories and systems of thought are always open to development through use... They are tools. As in the case of all tools, their value resides not in themselves but in their capacity to work shown in the consequences of their use.¹

The primary purpose of this chapter will be to explicate the conceptual tools that will structure my proposed account of queer subjectivity. Primarily, this explicates the pragmatic notion of the social self, especially as developed by John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Jane Addams. In brief, the self appears and develops in social transaction. That is, we gain and create a sense of ourselves in relation with other people, ideas, and our material world. But further, the self is socially constituted. The social atmosphere — norms, institutions, roles, relations — is part of me; it frames what I am, my positioning in the world, and my interpretive hold upon the world.

A thorough explication of the social self includes further explanation of the pragmatic methodologies that motivate the model. In what follows, I develop the following themes: (i.) the basic relation of organism and environment as transactional; (ii.) the role of habits and their constitution of mind; (iii.) the significance of the body; (iv.) the multiplicity of the self; and (v.) democracy as intelligent habit/disposition. I will also demonstrate how the social interpenetrates each of these aspects of selfhood.

¹ Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 83.
2.1 Experience — Transaction of Organism and Environment

To holistically understand the sociality of the self, we must first understand the inalienable relationship between organism and environment. Consider Dewey’s description of experience and the self in *Art as Experience*:

[Experience is] a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment, an environment that is human as well as physical, that includes the materials of tradition and institutions as well as local surroundings. The organism brings with it through its own structure, native and acquired, forces that play a part in the interaction. The self acts as well as undergoes, and its undergoings are not impressions stamped upon an inert wax but depend upon the way the organism reacts and responds… The organism is a force, not a transparency.  

Let us walk through this quote. First, Dewey emphasizes the thoroughgoing reciprocity between organism and environment. Organisms affect their environment in certain ways to satiate needs and desires; concurrently, environing factors act upon and demand certain responses from the organism. Dewey describes this dynamic as “adaptive adjustment.” Further, note that transactions with our environment are always infused with and structured by social meanings and values. The ways in which we put to use elements of our surroundings adapts our environment according to our aims, desires, and needs. We form groups, social institutions, and social scripts to aid our transactions with the environment. Hence, these become part of the environing conditions of experience.

Second, organisms play an active role in experience. I transact with my environment based on the nature of what I am, my needs, desires, and interests. For example, I require sufficient oxygen, steady access to water and nutrients, and so on. These elements are “native” to my structure. I also bring to the experience knowledge of past experiences that frame the

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3 Dewey defines environment generally as “…those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being.” *Democracy and Education* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 11.

interpretive lens with which I approach my situation. As Charlene Seigfried writes, “reality is always as much a function of one’s angle of vision and lived experience as it is of what is available to be experienced…”5 I acquire knowledge from my corpus of lived experience which I then mobilize in transaction with novel contexts. As such, past experiences become part of the structure of my being. Having grown up in the Midwest, experiencing winters with negative temperatures, my tolerance of cold weather is different than colleagues who grew up in the Southwest. Even when environing conditions are the same, individuals’ situations frame the experience and judgment of coldness differently. Conditions of the environment frame a situation and offer certain possibilities for my transaction. Likewise, and with as much force, the adaptive conditions of my being – my organism – guide and constrain the experience as well.

This illustrates what William James’ describes as the “double-barreled” nature of experience. It includes not only what we experience, but also how we experience it. Dewey explains: “[experience] is ‘double-barreled’ in that it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them both in an unanalyzed totality.”6 Rather, we get such distinctions through discrimination and reflection. I do not distinguish myself from the experience itself or from the thing which I experience. This transaction between organism (me, subject) and environment (thing, object) is an unanalyzed totality so long as there is not something problematic in the experience, something that causes pause, confusion, or the “irritation of doubt”7 that C.S. Peirce terms “secondness.”8 I certainly can draw your attention to the words you are currently reading and the seat in which you

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5 Seigfried, Pragmatism and Feminism, 153.
6 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 8.
currently sit. Yet these discrete sensations were not distinguishable until I drew your attention to them, though they were already part of your experience.

Further, to recognize that my past experiences, judgments, interactions, all inform my interpretive lens implies that experience is perspectival. That is, experiences are inevitably constituted in part by the mind engaged in the transaction. I bear certain habits and capacities for responding to my environment, for knowing what to do within discrete contexts, or what actions appear to me as functional within this context. This is not to say that my transactions with what surrounds me are arbitrary or free-form. Steven Fesmire explains: “Just as the artist’s medium (canvas, brushes, pigments, marble, etc.) has definite features that the good artist must perceive and work with, so our social environment is recalcitrant yet not wholly intransigent. It kicks back yet does not utterly refuse to be transformed.”9 The material conditions of the environment set constraints on what I can do; the material conditions of my organism set constraints; and my interpretive lens as formed by past experiences frames what I take to be helpful, productive, viable, or even possible within any given experience.

2.2 Habits, Mind, and Will

In “The Inclusive Philosophic Idea,” Dewey notes that “associated or conjoint behavior is a universal characteristic of all existence.”10 That is, things are always set in relation to one another and these relationships are, in part, what defines a thing as what it is. Peirce makes this point as well, arguing that the meaning of an object is the practical effects to which we put it and the effects that it has upon us.11 This is not to say that meaning is set within a singular

instantiation or encounter of a thing. Rather, how a thing changes in interactions – with organisms or in relation to other things – also helps define what it is. As Dewey explains, “the thing which is to be accepted and paid heed to is not what is originally given but that which emerges after the thing has been set under a great variety of circumstances in order to see how it behaves.”

What defines an organism specifically is its myriad “forms of association,” or the ways in which it associates with its world. Dewey defines the self as its co-constitutive transactions with varying environments that engender certain habits and dispositions. Dewey describes habits as “working adaptations of personal capacities with environing forces.” They are patterns of behavior adopted because of their proven serviceability in past experience; they secure an end and/or satisfy some need. Environmental cues prompt behavior that becomes organic to our transaction with the world. Thus, habits are “ways of using and incorporating the environment in which the latter has its say as surely as the former.” Like experience generally, habits are the process and product of transactions of the organism and environment.

In Human Nature and Conduct, Dewey establishes the intimate connection between habits, will, and the self:

[Bad habits] teach us that all habits are affections, that all have projectile power, and that a predisposition formed by a number of specific acts is an immensely more intimate and fundamental part of ourselves than are vague, general, conscious choices. All habits are demands for certain kind of activity; and they constitute the self. In any intelligible sense of the word will, they are will. They form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity.

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12 Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 65.
15 Ibid., 54.
16 Ibid., 15.
17 Ibid., 22.
This brief passage includes several significant characterizations of the self. First, habits represent patterns of transaction that have previously functioned for us, but also have “projectile power.” The circumstances in which habits develop suggest future conditions in which they will again be at service. This means that habits are both a culmination of what has come before, and a movement forward, or proposals for application in the future. Further, the passage indicates that habits constitute the self, often in ways much more intimate than what we articulate or verbalize about ourselves. This is because habits frame any attempt towards articulation, thought of, or expression of the self. Habits include the ways in which we think, on what we focus our attention and energies, how we make decisions, and what memories find salient or of continuing import. Bad or unintelligent habits – those that we enact unreflectively, or without conscious intention – define us just as intimately as claims we consciously affirm. Habits constitute will in the sense that they frame what aims/ends we find worth pursuing and how we invest energies into pursuing them. Will is “the body of habits, of active dispositions which makes a man do what he does.”

Again, habits frame the way we think and the approach we take to the world.

What individuates a self is its unique set of habits, dispositions, attitudes, capacities, and lived experiences that constitute it. Put another way, Dewey describes personality or character as “the interpenetration of habits.” A habit is not a rote play of gestures, simply repeated across various circumstances. Habits interact with one another, compromise one another, and amend one another based on what the situation calls for. This is what it means to say that habits are adaptive; they adapt to needs that arise in a specific situation which calls for a particular kind of satisfaction. Figuring out what a situation calls for, being able to identify the relevant aspects of the situation, relies on habits. Those dispositions that take priority in orchestrating and

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19 Ibid., 29.
negotiating other habits identify my character. I am, in a sense, “the working interaction of [my] habits.”

2.3 Body-Minds

A significant benefit of the pragmatic conception of self is that it emphasizes the significance of the body in how we transact with our world and, thus, what we are as selves. Not only is this an embodied notion of self, but further, there is no substantive distinction between mind and body.

In Experience and Nature, Dewey describes mind as “the whole system of meanings as they are embodied in the workings of organic life” and a “field… of operative meanings.” Earlier in the same piece, Dewey similarly describes mind as “the possession of and response to meanings.” Mind includes a common language of signs, symbols and gestures that enable communication; associating habits with certain experiences; capacities, both innate and acquired (as described above); the significance of we attribute to memories and how we mobilize them in future experience. A communal system of meanings and attitudes permeate our collective environment(s) and thus permeate the coterie of habits we individually develop in transaction with these environments. This is another way of explaining the social nature of the self. Further, mind is the “contextual and persistent” background to consciousness, which is “focal and transitive.” Mind couches consciousness within the wider context of past experiences, habits, and understandings of like circumstances. Consciousness denotes our attention to those parts of

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22 Ibid., 272.
23 Ibid., 303.
mind currently in transaction with whatever situation is at hand. It is the progression of occurrent habits as guided by the greater totality or reserves of mind overall.

For Dewey, none of these characterizations of mind separate it from body. Describing that which is “mental,” Dewey says that it is empirically distinguishable only insofar as it appears in participation and communication, both which are social phenomena.\textsuperscript{24} We mobilize this system of meanings called mind by engaging with our world. As described above, experience denotes an undifferentiated unity of subject-object, organism-environment; it is both a doing and an undergoing. Our body-minds do certain things, embody actions that mobilize certain meanings within the current context; as body-minds, we also undergo certain stimuli, thoughts, feelings that are part of the totality of the experience. Again, these components remain undifferentiated in thought/action insofar as the situation can be maneuvered without trouble/perplexity. To borrow from Beauvoir, the body is part of our situation from and through which we experience our surroundings. It is “the instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects.”\textsuperscript{25} Mereau-Ponty describes the body as our “primordial habit, the one that conditions all others and by which they can be understood.”\textsuperscript{26} The body enables and constrains how we transact with our environment, what capacities are available to us, how habits are incorporated into and frame our minds, and how we then enact habits to reorganize our environments.

Though we rightly describe some habits as more mental or intellectual and some as somatic or non-cognitive, they nonetheless interpenetrate one another. The body bears markers of our historicity. This includes how we train the body; what muscle memory it carries; how we

\textsuperscript{24} Dewey, “The Inclusive Philosophic Idea,” 49.  
\textsuperscript{25} Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 34.  
\textsuperscript{26} Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2014), 93.
have marked it with piercings, tattoos, or other adornments; and how we change its morphology and physiology with surgeries, dietary habits, exercise patterns, exposure to chemicals such as tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs, and so on. The body shapes the mind as well: I can feel when I complete a scale on the piano without fumbling; my body aches when I incorrectly execute a stroke in swimming; my body alerts me when my appetite exceeds my stomach or when I imbibe too much. In these ways, the nature of my bodily organism constrains and guides the development of the mind. For Dewey, this means that the traditional problem of mind/body dualism is moot: “In ultimate analysis the mystery that mind should use a body, or that a body should have a mind, is like the mystery that a man cultivating plants should use the soil; or that the soil which grows plants at all should grow those adapted to its own physico-chemical properties and relations.” My mind is inseparable from my body, which cannot be separated from the contexts which have provided the background for my body-mind. My body-mind is in dynamic relation to my surroundings and it is the continued becoming of self.

Feminist authors extoll the benefits of this pragmatic continuity of body-mind. For example, Seigfried writes:

[Dewey] coins the term “body-minds” to emphasize that feeling plays an essential role in human understanding. Because we have the capacity of feeling, our responses to natural and social environments are selective. Our susceptibility to the useful and harmful in our surroundings eventuates in anticipation of consequences and intelligent foresight. Feelings, therefore, reveal and direct us toward objective features of experience.

Benefits of body-mind continuity also become particularly clear in accounting for ways in which different types of bodies are allocated differential status as knowers/agents/persons. Shannon Sullivan opens “The Need for Truth” by emphasizing the “perspectival corporeality of all human

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knowers.” Generally, feminist authors stress that individuals are afforded different opportunities and denied recognition based on certain embodiments. I will return to this point in Chapter Four, “Reconstructing Queer Concerns,” when I redress the challenges of queer subjectivity presented in Chapter One.

2.4 Multiplicity of Selves

Self develops in transaction with its changing environment(s). I formulate habits to affect certain changes in my environment, obtain certain ends, satiate desires, and create new possibilities for myself. But note that, as Dewey writes, “Because the environment is not all of one piece, man’s house is divided within itself, against itself.” Insofar as we gain a sense of self in relation to various others and concrete circumstances, the self is a multiplicity.

Mead describes the self as two interdependent components: the “me” and the “I.” Those attitudes that we glean from and attribute to the social milieu constitute the “me.” The “I” is the agential force that negotiates and responds to these various social attitudes. Put differently, the “me” is self taken as object whereas the “I” is self as subject. “I” never escape my sociality insofar as I rely on social systems of meanings to articulate myself in transaction with others and in transaction with myself. The content and processing of my thoughts relies on this sociality. The “I” engages social attitudes and makes use of social meanings in its affectations. Yet the “me” with which others transact is irreducible to the “I.”

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30 For example, in “The Scaling of Bodies and the Politics of Identity,” Iris Marion Young writes: “When the dominant culture defines some groups as different, as Other, the members of those groups are imprisoned in their bodies. Dominant discourse defines them in terms of bodily characteristics, and constructs those bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated, or sick.” *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 123.
…the “I” is something that is never entirely calculable. The “me” does call for a certain sort of an ‘I’ in so far as we meet the obligations that are given in conduct itself, but the “I” is always something different from what the situation itself calls for.”³³

I stand in relation to various social institutions. As such, “I” variably relate to myriad “me’s” that develop within discrete contexts that call forth different responses from me. How I negotiate these various relationships and their incumbent demands upon my body, my actions, my sentiments, are my own insofar as “I” negotiate these demands.

As Dewey describes, the self is “in process of making… capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions.”³⁴ In academia, my friends transact with “me” under certain circumstances, my professors alternatively apprehend me under rather different circumstances, and my students know another “me.” I recall college-me, seminary-me, masters-me. Now at Purdue, I again take up new relations and adjust my multiple “me’s.” I interact with new people, who have their own habits, desires, and projects, that intersect with and resonate with my own. These new contexts create new senses of myself, changing the very contours of what I am, what I take myself to be, and thus how I express myself to others. Hence, I am multiple. My habits variably interpenetrate one another depending on the context, what aspects of myself become salient, and what relational demands I take to be significant at that time, in that situation. I am multiple in that I have conflicting desires, projects, and aims that might come into conflict with one another.

Yet, I am a dynamic unity, a body-mind uniquely situated within my environment, thus constituting a unique vantage. Mead writes:

The fact that all selves are constituted by or in terms of the social process, and are individual reflections of it… is not in the least incompatible with, or destructive of, the fact that every individual self has its own peculiar individuality, its own unique pattern; because each individual self within that process, while it reflects in its organized structure

³³ Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 178.
the behavior pattern of that process as a whole, does so from its own particular and unique standpoint within that process…

I engage with the world given the concrete form and capacities of my body. I also engage the world based on the corpus of past experiences, problem-solving methods, memories, and so on. Aspirations and desires develop in relation to those experiences that we have had and what values we attribute to them. As selves, we negotiate and collate various desires. Seigfried explains:

The multiplicity of ends set by our emotional and practical subjectivity has to be brought into a working relationship with one another for a sense of self to emerge and stabilize, for meaningful communication to take place among persons, and to enable people to live together amicably.

The self is “a distinctive centre of desire, thinking and aspiration.” We often have conflicting desires that arise from demands of different social relations and/or roles. No two people have the same set of past experiences and no two individuals are exactly located the same (most obviously because we are bodily discrete). Thus, though I am a product of my social surroundings, I am not merely a product of my sociality.

2.5 The Social as the “Inclusive Philosphic Idea”

Having delineated the self as a body-mind’s negotiation and development of habits in transaction with its constitutive environment, let us now pull together the various manifestations of the social that permeate this process. To reiterate the co-constitutive nature of self and society, I offer ways in which Addams’ work, especially with the Hull House settlement, illustrates each of these points.

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35 Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 201.
37 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 216.
2.5.1 Our Social/Material Situation

The self’s co-constitutive environment is both material and social, or, as Beauvoir writes, our world is “penetrated with human meanings.”\(^{38}\) This means that we form habits within an environment that thus disposes us in a certain way towards understanding and normalizing certain patterns of behavior and thought. Dewey writes: “…social phenomena take up and incorporate within themselves things associated in the narrower way which we term the physical. It gives a ludicrous result to think of social phenomena merely as lying on top of physical phenomena.”\(^{39}\)

Experience includes not only the object of experience, but also our interpretive framework(s), habits of transaction, what ends-in-view guide our transactions, and the concrete circumstances of the experience, which include social meanings and norms. Hence, habits develop in transaction with and already attuned to a concrete social milieu.

Consequently, we develop rather parochial habits if denied a richness of experience in relation to diversely minded peoples. The ways in which we encounter new peoples and experiences depend upon what background experiences and communities contribute to our interpretive lens, or our conceptual standpoint. Addams emphasizes this in her introduction to *Democracy and Social Ethics*:

> [W]e are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences, since the result of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life. We know instinctively that if we grow contemptuous of our fellows, and consciously limit our intercourse to certain kinds of people whom we have previously decided to respect, we not only tremendously circumscribe our range of life, but limit the scope of our ethics.\(^{40}\)

When we limit our interactions with people whose situations diverge from our own, we foreclose developing more diverse habits and/or flexing habits in new ways. We also lose the ability to

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40 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 4.
foster sympathies with foreign others and to reconsider habits and ideas under a more holistic understanding of how others transact with, understand, and shape the world.

As a corrective, Addams argues that sympathy and feelings of obligation towards others develop from “a common fund of memories and affections.” One of the founding beliefs of Hull House was that its situation within a poorer Chicago neighborhood would supplement Addams’ understanding of those individuals whose circumstances she sought to aid and improve. In changing her living situation, Addams surrounded herself with the actual social and material conditions that were the subject of her perplexity. This change in environment allowed for changed patterns of thinking and problem-solving. As Seigfried explains, the settlement “gave residents ‘an opportunity of seeing institutions from the recipient’s standpoint.’”

In *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Addams writes on “the simple proposition, that man’s action is found in his social relationships in the way in which he connects with his fellows; that his motives for action are the zeal and affection with which he regards his fellows.” Seigfried explains Addams’ motivation:

> Facts should not be so neatly detached from both the way they came to the attention of the residents nor from the lives they supposedly captured. Doing so left out the subjectivity of both the residents, who were appalled, baffled, and exhilarated, by turns, at the conditions around them and of the people whose lives they were learning about and attempting to ameliorate… Addams emphasizes that the settlement method of gaining knowledge, its vision of how to ground insights in facts and develop strategies for social reform, was to live among those about whom the residents wanted to learn more and to treat them as neighbors, not as subjects of investigation.

Theory comes out of practice and our perspective is a function of our situation, related to the opportunities and institutions which variably constrain and enable us. Though knowledge and

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41 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 2.
43 Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (Lexington, KY: 2016), 73.
44 Seigfried, “The Social Self in Jane Addams’s Prefaces and Introductions,” 130.
understanding cannot be separated from our perspective, we can supplement it in dialogue with others’ discrete perspectives. Addams describes settlers as “pioneers in the midst of difficult surroundings… migrating from one condition of life to another totally unlike it…”

Addams and her compatriots thus fostered shared understanding of circumstances foreign to their own and the accompanying perspectives that had developed within such an environment.

Transacting within changed conditions, Addams and other boarders could better understand the habits and behaviors that developed in relation to these conditions. For example, in her discussion of “Charitable Effort,” Addams describes charity workers’ perplexity at working girls’ spending on clothing at the expense of feeding herself and her family:

The girl who has a definite social standing, who has been to a fashionable school or to a college, whose family live in a house seen and known by all her friends and associates, may afford to be very simple, or even shabby as to her clothes, if she likes. But the working girl, whose family lives in a tenement, or moves from one small apartment to another, who has little social standing and has to make her own place, knows full well how much habit and style of dress has to do with her position… [I]f social advancement is her aim, it is the most sensible thing she can do … Her clothes are her background, and from them she is largely judged.

What motivates others’ habits is alternately understood when we, ourselves, are in transaction with the conditions that produced that habit.

2.5.2 Democracy as Intelligent Habit

James describes it as a blindness of human beings that we all-too-easily perceive our own experiences as coextensive with the reality of a situation. Rather, “…neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands.”

As we started to develop

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in the previous section, a primary means for correcting such blindness is engaging with more
diverse experiences. In “Habit, Relaxation, and the Open Mind,” Megan Craig explains James:

> We naturally see things through the lens of our own lives, but we have the potential to
> expand our lives in the same way that we have the potential to cultivate new habits… It
> requires entanglements in the thicket of new experiences, particularly those experiences
> that challenge or undercut one’s sure footing and safely guarded beliefs…\(^{48}\)

This reiterates our earlier point that we gain a holistic understanding of a thing or an organism by
understanding its many relationships and its various capacities for change and/or response.

Addams argues that diversity in experience, or a “democratic interest in life,” is the surest way to
“give truth complete social expression.”\(^{49}\)

Addams and Dewey’s advocacy of democracy not merely as an ideal of government, but
as a way of life,\(^{50}\) exemplifies this belief in the benefits of relating to diverse peoples and
experiences. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey writes:

> A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated
> living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of
> individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of
> others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is
> equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory
> which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.\(^{51}\)

On the same page, Dewey further describes democracy as characterized by the “widening of the
area of shared concerns” and “the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities.” Such
descriptions echo Addams’ own conception of democracy, which Seigfried argues heavily
influenced Dewey:

> [Addams’] conception of democracy extends beyond being merely a sentiment
> expressing a desire for the well-being of all people, although it does include this


\(^{49}\) Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 5.

\(^{50}\) Charlene Seigfried describes Addams and Dewey’s characterization of Democracy as such in “Democracy as a
Way of Life,” presented at the SAAP (Spokane, WA: March 2011).

\(^{51}\) Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 83.
sentiment; it also extends beyond an ideology espousing “the essential dignity and equality of all men,” although this is also an important component, to offer “a rule of living as well as a test of faith.”

Addams and Dewey both understand democracy to include fostering certain dispositions towards charitably regarding more diversely situated peoples; an intellectual habit of taking seriously alternative perspectives.

Thus, I propose we conceive of this responsibility toward diverse experiences and relations as formulating what Dewey describes as intelligent rather than routine habit. Dewey explains: “A flexible, sensitive habit grows more varied, more able by practice and use… the intelligent or artistic habit is the desirable thing…” Habits are intelligent insofar as they are flexible, percipient, and thus better equip us to handle future circumstances and environments.

Further, Dewey explains the need for continued revision of habits in relation to new experiences:

For every habit incorporates within itself some part of the objective environment, and no habit and no amount of habits can incorporate the entire environment within itself or themselves. There will always be disparity between them and the results actually attained. Hence the work of intelligence in observing consequences and in revising and readjusting habits, even the best of good habits, can never be foregone.

For illustration, I offer two principle examples of how Addams and Dewey advocate for democracy as intelligent habit.

First, prejudices are among those habits that Dewey calls more intimate than those we expressly affirm or, as Fesmire writes, “…the habits we betray are often more important than those we parade.” Without our express intention, habits shape how we view the world and how we take others within the world. On the other hand, unlike individuals can illuminate our prejudices. Seigfried identifies this as a significant methodological point for Addams:

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54 Ibid., 38.
throughout *Twenty Years in Hull House* [Addams] reveals how the concrete specificity of her interactions helped her recognize the class and ethnic prejudices informing her good intentions while at the same time providing the means for developing an authentic appreciation of and a more knowledgeable response to a lived diversity that could not have been predicted beforehand.\(^{56}\)

Engaging others’ divergent perspectives can throw into relief ways in which our circumstances alternatively form how we experience the world. Factors of our mind-body that necessarily shape our experience include our class, ethnicity, gender, and other social categories. Enmeshed in each of these are certain prescriptions, expectations, institutions, and norms that play into how we interact with the world and how others interact with us. Hence, interacting with others who stand in different relation to these institutions/norms reveals certain things that we take for granted, certain habits that we embody, and that constitute ourselves. We thus gain access to interrogating these habits, rethinking them, and proposing ways of redirecting our energies to habits that are more equitable in doing justice to others.

Second, diverse experiences in relation to unlike individuals provide us opportunity to flex habits in a different way and/or obtain new habits. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey explains:

> Apart from communication, habit-forming wears grooves; behavior is confined to channels established by prior behavior… But this holds only of a habit, a habit in isolation, a non-communicating habit. Communication not only increases the number and variety of habits, but tends to link them subtly together, and eventually to subject habit-forming in a particular case to the habit of recognizing that new modes of association will exact a new use of it.\(^{57}\)

Dewey also describes the benefits of diverse transactions in *Human Nature and Conduct*: “The more numerous our habits the wider the field of possible observation and foretelling.”\(^{58}\) We cannot entirely anticipate what experiences we have and how these experiences will summon

\(^{56}\) Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, 78.


different habits. However, we can (re)structure our environment to encourage certain experiences to occur more frequently. Additionally, we can actively work to place ourselves in environments with more diverse characters that broaden our opportunities for gaining a better understanding of discrete circumstances yielding differing modes of reasoning. We can work to actively structure our environment such that we enact better, more reflective habits that work towards the betterment of society.

2.5.3 The Personal is Social

A third way in which self and society bear a mutually adjusting relationship is that thought is itself social in both its development and its application. The significance of this is that not only is mind “essentially a social phenomenon,”\(^5^9\) guided and constrained by its material/social environment, but the structuring of our environment(s) as guided and constrained by mind as well.

First, let us consider how thought is a social endeavor. In explaining mental association, Dewey writes: “The entire operation of individual experimentation and soliloquizing has been influenced at every point by reference to the social medium in which their results are to be set forth and responded to.”\(^6^0\) We develop a sense for what is meaningful and what different actions signify by observing others. We settle beliefs and determine actions based upon anticipating what consequences our thoughts will have when put into effect.

For Mead, thought is social interaction within ourselves: “The very process of thinking is, of course, simply an inner conversation that goes on, but it is a conversation of gestures which in its completion implies the expression of that which one thinks to an audience.”\(^6^1\) Gestures solicit

\(^5^9\) Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, 133.
\(^6^1\) Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, 143.
certain responses and affect actor and recipient analogously.\textsuperscript{62} We learn what different gestures mean — what response they call for — by first observing others using these gestures. From such experiences, we cultivate an internalized play of gestures. That is, I formulate an action plan by appraising environing factors and anticipating what response certain actions will prompt. Thus, thought denotes an exchange of gestures between myself and generalized other, or the social attitudes of my interlocutor(s) as I imagine they will respond.\textsuperscript{63} I anticipate a return gesture from another; I consider potential consequences of my action for myself and others; how to appeal to them to get my point across.

Thought manifests in social transaction, but also relies upon social exchange, even with oneself or a generalized other. This again implicates the importance of varying our experiences and relationships. We construct a generalized notion of others in transaction with those who surround us. As feminist writers such as Seyla Benhabib, argue, we often fall prey to a disembodied, depersonalized generalized other.\textsuperscript{64} Such an abstraction inevitably retains vestiges of the perspective doing the abstraction and misrepresents differentially-situated peoples. Rather, we need myriad models of diversely embodied and diversely situated selves to equip us with a properly representative coterie of concrete others in relation to which we calibrate our habits, gestures, responses.

Insofar as thought – that which we take to be the most subjective of experiences – is already social, this further indicates that there is no clean separation between ‘subjectivity’ and

\textsuperscript{62} Mead, \textit{Mind, Self, & Society}, 46.

\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Ibid., 154.

\textsuperscript{64} Seyla Benhabib describes the “autonomous self” of Rawls and Kohlberg in this way. Though Benhabib offers Mead’s conception of the self/other relation as a more concrete alternative, the challenge remains to seek an ever more expansive generalized other in transaction with myriad concrete others. Benhabib, “The Generalized and the Concrete Other,” in \textit{Feminism as Critique}, ed. Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 85.
‘objectivity.’ The individual instantiates the society in which it is situated. However, the claim is reciprocal; society is also an instantiation of individuals’ thought processes or mind(s). Dewey writes: “The social affords us an observable instance of a ‘realm of mind’ objective to an individual, by entering into which as a participating member organic activities are transformed into acts having a mental quality.” When we take the self as social, subjectivity entails the perspectival mind in transaction with its surrounding social circumstances. Mind, thought, is intersubjective rather than atomistic worldview generated by the individual. Objectivity names that which is socially corroborated by other minds within the concrete situations to which an idea or proposition lays claim. That which is subjective as “privately entertained” or yet to be tested in (social) action.

Addams emphasizes the sociality of thought in her commitment to intertwining projects of social- and self-reform. In her introduction to *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams writes:

All about us are men and women who have become unhappy in regard to their attitude toward the social order itself... These men and women have caught a moral challenge raised by the exigencies of contemporaneous life; some are bewildered, others who are denied the relief which sturdy action brings are even seeking an escape, but all are increasingly anxious concerning their actual relations to the basic organization of society. The test which they would apply to their conduct is a social test... The conception of life which they hold has not yet expressed itself in social changes or legal enactment, but rather in a mental attitude of maladjustment, and in a sense of divergence between their consciences and conduct... In the perplexity of this intricate situation at least one thing is becoming clear: if the latter day moral ideal is in reality that of a social morality, it is inevitable that those who desire it must be brought in contact with the moral experiences of the many in order to produce an adequate social motive.

One’s ethics is not sustained on individual momentum alone. Even if an individual of a hegemonic group does not endorse the group’s superiority, they nonetheless benefit from the

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66 Ibid., 51.
67 This paraphrases Louise Knight as presented in Seigfried, “The Social Self in Jane Addams’s Prefaces and Introductions,” 130.
systematic privileges that category confers. Though the rural, white conservative prides himself on not personally behaving differently toward individuals of another race, this itself does not undo institutional racism. Individual sentiment is insufficient in mobilizing necessary environmental and/or institutional changes. Reciprocally, macro changes gain no momentum without changing the sentiments the disparate individuals involved. An adequate personal ethic needs validation in practice through corroboration with unlike-minded peoples.

Understanding the social nature of thought helps us articulate how to direct, reconstruct, and improve the mutually adjusting relationship between self and society. As Fesmire writes, “[Social habits] are the main objects and tools of philosophic interpretation and criticism.” Our minds develop in transaction with certain social habits, mores, and conceptual frameworks that function as tools for understanding. These give us language to express ourselves, to question, and to critique. When we alter social institutions, this reconstitutes our surroundings and engenders different habits; this is what Dewey means when he writes that social institutions create individuals. Dewey explains:

…we change character from worse to better only by changing conditions—among which, once more, are our own ways of dealing with the one we judge. We cannot change habit directly: that notion is magic. But we can change it indirectly by modifying conditions, by an intelligent selecting and weighting of the object which engage attention and which influence the fulfilment of desires.

This underlines the reciprocal formation and adjustment of self and society, individual and environment. We create selves better attuned to their environment by adapting the transactional relationship.

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2.6 In Brief

For the American Pragmatists, there is no substance or essence that defines the self. It is not static, it is not some substratum that underlies our myriad experiences with the world. Rather, self is dynamic and relational; it appears and takes shape in social transaction(s). The self is both process and product, in much the same way as Dewey describes a work of art. We are the product of these transactions, but a product that is always in process, always open for adaptation and reorientation based upon new experiences and relations. The self is *becoming*, transacting and mutually adapting with its environment.

By way of a conclusion, I borrow one more characterization of self from Dewey. I am the play between my habitual self and my innovative self:

There is the individual that belongs in a continuous system of connected events which reinforce its activities and which form a world in which it is at home, consistently at one with its own preferences, satisfying its requirements… Then there is the individual that finds a gap between its distinctive bias and the operations of things through which alone its need can be satisfied; it is broken off; discrete, because it is at odds with its surroundings. It either surrenders, conforms, and for the sake of peace becomes a parasitical subordinate… or its activities set out to remake conditions in accord with desire. In the latter process, intelligence is born—not mind which appropriates and enjoys the whole of which it is a part, but mind as individualized, initiating, adventuring, experimenting, dissolving.\(^\text{72}\)

We have myriad relations that foster varied, often conflicting habits, desires, and aims; we form commitments to communities that place dissonant demands on us. Insofar as it develops, experiments, and learns within particular material and social constraints, the self bears resemblance to the conceptual, critical, behavioral, and affective tools that comprise its environment. But the self is a force, holding in variable tension and harmony multiple “me’s”; negotiating social obligations and expectations from communities, family ties, values, commitments. Herein lies the transformative power of the self: to remake the social. Describing

moral deliberation, Dewey writes: “the thing actually at stake… [is] what kind of person one is to become, what sort of self is in the making, what kind of a world is making.” Insofar as it bears unique relation to its environment(s), tools, experiences, the self stands at a distance from any one of these social influences. Because we develop resemblance to and dissonance with our surroundings — material and social — we bear the potential to adapt them to our ends and values. This returns our discussion to the queer.

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CHAPTER 3. THE (QUEER) SELF

The plans which are formed, the principles which [we project] as guides of reconstructive action, are not dogmas. They are hypotheses to be worked out in practice, and to be rejected, corrected and expanded as they fail or succeed in giving our present experience the guidance it requires.¹

Our point of inquiry is how to conceptualize the self, taking LGBTIA+ lives as the starting point for theorizing. Thus far, I have developed a multivalent notion of queerness and discussed challenges for finding a model of self that accommodates and recognizes the specificity of its divergent embodiments. I also outlined relevant tools within the pragmatic tradition that will frame my own proposed theory of selfhood that answers the needs and challenges of formulating a queer subjectivity.

My hypothesis is twofold: first, that pragmatism’s social self not only accommodates, but encourages queerness; and second, that when we apply the social self to queer contexts, we thereby queer the self. Both concepts — queerness and the social self — affirm the significance of our social environment and situation in inextricably constraining and enabling the subjects they engender and sustain. They also both account for ways in which this relationship is reciprocal; the social legitimates a certain formulation of selfhood, but selves also bear the potential to de- and re-construct the social. When queer and pragmatic lexicons converge, we realize that to be a self at all is to be queer. That is, the social nature of the self means that it can destabilize the very social institutions and relations that enable, guide, and constrain its projects; we bear the potential to queer the norms that situate and define us.

¹ Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 55.
3.1 Queer - Queerness - Queering

In my first chapter, I emphasize that there is no uniform, systematic definition of queerness. Most concretely, queer refers to LGBTIA+ individuals insofar as they deviate (in one way or another) from the compulsory mapping of sex, gender, and sexuality. More broadly, queer describes something as odd, strange, appearing out of place; it is dissonant, unexpected, and/or disorienting. Coupled with this broader sense, that which is queer holds the possibility to queer. Again, this can mean many things, depending on the context, the trait, or person. It can mean undoing the standard or assumed relation between sex, gender, and sexuality. It can also mean displacing or destabilizing a norm or idea that is generally presumed to be solid or stable, necessary or natural.

Equipped with the concepts and methodology of pragmatism, I now offer another definition of the broader sense of queerness. That which is queer (adj.) problematizes and interrupts habitual understanding, creates perplexity, such that the situation calls for inquiry and deliberation. To reiterate, queerness is definitionally and functionally problematic. In Peircean terms, queerness is an instance of secondness;\(^2\) we experience resistance, interruption, or the “irritation of doubt.”\(^3\) For Dewey, it presents a conflict in experience that requires inquiry and readjustment of one’s energies and environment to satisfy the problem and resume pursuing one’s aims.\(^4\) Addams similarly describes the importance of moments of perplexity that instructs us towards a more “wide reading of human life.”\(^5\) We experience something as queer insofar as it resists comprehension given our habitual ways of thinking.

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\(^3\) Cf. Peirce, “How To Make Our Ideas Clear,” 83.
\(^5\) Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 8.
Translating queerness into pragmatic terms benefits our queer project in several ways. First, pragmatists talk about problems not in the sense of being necessarily detrimental, but rather as needing attention, requiring further thought, or redirecting action. What this means for queerness is that we can theorize it as problematic and disruptive without also coding queerness as negative. This complements the project of reclaiming the term. For example, Eve Sedgwick writes: “Part of what I understand to be the exciting charge of the very word ‘queer’ is that it embraces, instead of repudiating, what have for many of us been formative childhood experiences of difference and stigmatization.”

A second benefit is that applying a pragmatic lens to queerness allows for a plurality of meanings, since meanings are situation-dependent. Something can be queer in one context, or in the parlance of one group, yet normalized in others. For example, many of the practices that were celebrated as part of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival -- public nudity, sex-positive seminars, contests to see who could fit the most cheese balls under one breast -- are censured as queer and inappropriate in other contexts. Acknowledging pluralism also accommodates the conflicting and contentious definitions of queerness. In some usages, queer identifies gay and lesbian communities; in other contexts, it names something as odd and out-of-place; in yet another, it alludes and undermines all claims to fixed identification.

Reading queerness in pragmatic terms, that which is queer problematizes the norm, concept, idea, or practice in question with the potential for revision, or rather, queering. This definition is operative, meaning that it offers a guide that will not fit every given situation exactly. It bears the possibility of revision based on its application and amendment within

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concrete contexts. Armed with this notion of queerness, my strategy is to consider those ways in which pragmatism’s social self does justice to queer lives.

3.2 Queering the Social Self

For Dewey, the social self is a mind-body characterized by its interpenetration of habits, developed in transaction with its positioning in the world. I am the product of myriad interwoven factors. Each of these foster certain habits and dispositions that coalesce in who/what I am and my hold upon the world. These habits interact with, inform, and mutually modify one another.

Consider gender norms to be a set of habits in this sense. We adopt gender habits in transaction with the environment(s) we encounter. Shannon Sullivan takes this approach in “Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey.” As Sullivan explains, “it helps us both to understand gender as a productive, not just limiting structure of existence that is constitutive of the body, and to explore the co-constitutive relationship of individual gender habits and cultural gender constructs.”

The upshot is that we can then subject gender habits to critical reflection and consider ways of reconstituting our environment(s) to engender changes in the way that we conceive of and enact gender.

Mead explains the process by which we gain a nascent sense of self:

… he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved.

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7 My physicality; my parentage and other influential relationships; my memories; my working capacities; how my past experiences shape my current interpretive lens; the social norms operative in my community that furnish certain demands and expectations for me; the various roles that I enact in my community or communities; my goals, aims, and desires.
10 Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 138.
We learn to take ourselves as both subject and object by experiencing others’ attitudes towards us and how they transact with us. Similarly, we learn our gender habits by first having others inscribe us with the gender habits that they believe are entailed by our bodies. Current gender customs place great emphasis on the sex of a child even before birth; expecting parents often begin forming gendered expectations and associations based on prenatal identifications of sex. In other words, before we can gender ourselves, or reflectively choose our own gender habits, we are shaped by the gender-habits of others.

This narrative is complicated by the various situations we encounter as we grow into these gender habits. We move between different groups of people and encounter more instances and models of gender-habits. In addition to our immediate family, we now have gender displays from other authorities, such as teachers, babysitters, the characters we see on t.v. and in books. These images may offer alternative gender-habits, thus diversifying those which we may adopt, or they may reinforce already-inscribed gender-habits. Cordelia Fine notes that one of the reasons why gender-neutral parenting is so difficult is that, even if parents take great pains to create a gender-neutral environment at home, the child encounters other environments that are coded along gendered lines. Kids enter the classroom and have teachers that separate classes into boys and girls; they learn from “jeer pressure” that girls are supposed to like certain toys and boys like others. These are instances in which our institutionalized custom of binary genders shapes nascent gender-habits.

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12 “Jeer pressure” is the term that Fine uses to describe the compulsion for kids to play with “gender-appropriate” toys. Fine notes that “children receive distinctively cooler responses from peers when they play in gender-inappropriate ways.” Ibid., 218.
Recall Addams’ emphasis on the importance of choosing one’s experiences diversely. To the extent that we experience varied expressions of gender-habits, we have a wider array of potentialities to adopt for ourselves. Or the reverse, the extent that children are raised within a community that strictly follows dichotomized gender habits, they have few models to pattern any gender habits to the contrary. I grew up with extended family members in same-sex relationships and an uncle who was a drag queen. My parents normalized these experiences for me and my sister by modeling accepting, positive attitudes towards these gender-habits. Yet we were also situated in a politically conservative community in which we had classmates whose families grew up in the same conservative environment and censured any gender-habits at odds with compulsory heterosexuality and gender binarism. Encouraged by parents and family that legitimate a greater diversity of gender-habits, my sister and I developed the disposition to understand gender and sexuality as more diverse than our peers whose circumstances engendered more rigidified gender-habits.

The proliferation and maintenance of gender occurs through learning gender habits in transaction with an environment that is already materially and socially coded with gender customs. As a self, I am a materially and socially constituted being – body-mind – characterized by my unique conglomeration and mobilization of habits. Insofar as habits interpenetrate one another\textsuperscript{13} and mutually modify one another\textsuperscript{14} in relation to my ever-changing situation, they bear the potential to queer one another. Sullivan explains: “Because of the complexity and crisscrossing of the lines of cultural power that penetrate the body via its habits, gender (as well

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 30.
as other) habits can cut against one another to break up both their own fixity and the fixity of cultural gender constructs.”¹⁵ Put another way, I am queer.

My physiology, my physical location within the world, and the way in which I embody social meanings entail a queer self. Consider the following, in which Dewey characterizes the relationship between social custom and individuality:

…what can be called distinctively individual in behavior and mind is not, contrary to traditional theory, an original datum. Doubtless physical or physiological individuality always colors responsive activity and hence modifies the form which custom assumes in its personal reproductions… But it is important to note that it is a quality of habit, not an element or force existing apart from adjustment of the environment and capable of being termed a separate individual mind.¹⁶

Dewey’s emphasis is that what we identify as “distinctively individual” is nonetheless developed in relation to one’s environment, which includes other human beings and the effects of their projects to reform their environment. Social psychology and custom are not derivative of a more private individual psyche. However, this passage also implies that the individual is not simply derivative of social custom. Dewey writes that physical and physiological individuality colors and modifies how we personally reproduce customs. Taking gender norms as an example of such customs, this indicates that we necessarily queer gender norms to some extent when we embody them.

Our interpenetration of habits is distinctively queer insofar as our set of relationships and memberships within different communities is uniquely our own. No two selves stand in identical relation to all the same people, situations, or communities. Insofar as each relationship presents its own commitments, demands, and expectations, it engenders different habits. Further, habits are both recalcitrant, but also reflective and adaptive. Again, Sullivan explains: “In isolation,

each of an adult’s particular habits may indeed be inflexible because of the rigidity of the institution that helped form it, but precisely this rigidity can help create the impetus for change when it causes a particular habit to conflict with other, rigid habits.”

17 We move among different contexts, relationships evolve, and our aims and projects demand re-organizations of habits for other purposes. All these situational components contribute to how habits contest and modify one another. Our personal appropriation and deployment of gender-habits bears the potential of adapting, amending, or abandoning them. Using the verbiage of queer theory, how we embody a coterie of norms bears the potential to queer them, to re-signify them. The multiplicity with which we embody any given norm in various contexts enables its subversion.

In Mead’s terms, the social self is the transaction between the “me” and the “I,” two irreducible and inalienable aspects of the self. The “I” is that agential response to the social milieu or social attitudes we read as being related to ourselves. This collection of social attitudes that takes “Elaine” as object is “me.” Insofar as I interpret, understand, and negotiate these social attitudes, expectations, and demands, “I” am subject. “I” can express myself only through the “me” which appears in social interaction, which depends on shared gestures and meanings. Yet “I” exceed these social expressions. “I” am not reducible to the social norms and gestures that inscribe me, though they equip me with tools for interpreting and expressing myself.

I am queer. “I” have expression only in relation to the language of social norms and practices which I share with others. But it is the transaction between “I” and “me” which creates this continuity that we call the self. My self is the interplay of various demands that “I” take as expectations for “me.” Recall, “…the ‘I’ is something that is never entirely calculable… the ‘I’ is always something different from what the situation itself calls for.”

18 I choose how to perform

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18 Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 178.
and respond to my surroundings. I emerge (both for others and for myself) in social interaction and thus “I” am never outside of the social. Yet “I” decide how to play within the social. This is an example of James’ notion of the “double-barreledness” of experience: it is not only what we experience, but also how we experience. Mead explains:

> The fact that all selves are constituted by or in terms of the social process, and are individual reflections of it… is not in the least incompatible with, or destructive of, the fact that every individual self has its own peculiar individuality, its own unique pattern; because each individual self within that process, while it reflects in its organized structure the behavior pattern of that process as a whole, does so from its own particular and unique standpoint within that process, and thus reflects in its organized structure a different aspect or perspective of this whole social behavior pattern…

Social norms and expectations are the means at our disposal for self-expression, but how we play within these guidelines, how we take them to guide our lives and our expression, is ours to enact.

Further, insofar as the self is queer, it also holds the power to queer. Because of our unique vantage upon the world, we can problematize one another’s perspectives, alter one another’s habits, and restructure common environments to affect substantial and personal changes. In the last chapter, we saw this especially evident in Addams’ work with the Hull House settlement. Its organizing principle was that we adapt personal and social habits by shifting something in our shared environment. In queer parlance, we queer the parameters of our situation and thus ourselves.

In “Toward a Queer Social Welfare Studies,” Shannon Jackson explores the “queer domesticity” of Hull House and how Addams herself fought for a “queer imaging” of social

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20 Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 201.
22 Ibid., 161.
welfare. Already in her subtitle, Jackson draws attention to the queerness of a settlement itself. Whereas settling something means to fix in place, the settlement’s purpose was to unsettle the circumstances that constrained the area at that time. In *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Addams writes on the associations with the word “settlement”: “The word still implies migrating from one condition of life to another totally unlike it, and against this implication the resident of an American settlement takes alarm.” The residents of Hull House’s positioning placed them in queer relation to material surroundings in which they were out of place, but also in queer relation to one another.

Jackson emphasizes the power of these relations to queer ideas of kinship, home, and the maternal that normally circumscribes these women and their environments. For example, Jackson writes:

…we can conceive Hull House space as a generative region if not exactly a fixed “option,” thereby allowing us to see the unsettling of terms such as *family*, *kinship*, *welfare*, and *the state*, even when such redefinition was not self-consciously foregrounded.

That redefinition, for instance, meant adapting to an alternate spatial style, allowing the inherited formality of the Hull mansion’s parlors, dining rooms, and bedrooms to be disrupted by the continual reentry of children, adolescents, working women, immigrants, and varieties of neighbors.

Hull House represents a “generative region,” or a place in which new meanings were forming with the concurrent unsettling of contemporary normative institutions that defined relations such as family, kinship, welfare, and state. The space was defined by discordance: formal décor framed the space; its inhabitants were people that traditionally would not have been the main actors in such spaces; it was used for myriad purposes other than its design suggests. The residents’ transactions within the settlement — with the house itself, each other, diverse

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neighbors, state resources — modeled and made visible a new way of being in their world. Note, as well, that in this passage, Jackson explains that such redefinition occurred even though this was not among the primary intentions of Hull House.\textsuperscript{25}

Jackson also writes on the queerness of Addams herself, speaking not of Addams’ sexuality, but within a wider scope of kinship relations:

Because Jane Addams was not a biological mother who simultaneously made use of a kind of maternal rhetoric, the partiality of her alignment seems particularly important. It is in that space between the regulating image and the daily practices of individuals—a “shift in the topography” that does “not appear immediately coherent in the available lexicon of legitimation—that alternate conceptions of parenthood, family, and social formation can be gleaned, if not exactly legitimated.\textsuperscript{26}

Addams was partially aligned insofar as she had affiliations with other ways of life, or membership within a community different than the one in which Hull House was situated. She fostered mutual interest with Hull House tenants and neighbors, but also not completely assimilate to their circumstances. She could not adopt completely their approach to the world, since her background, and thus her interpretive lens, differed from their own. Addams stood as a partial insider, but also still with an outside perspective. Her partiality of alignment also meant that Addams used certain social scripts, relied on their normative meanings, while using them in a way that was non-normative. She enacted motherly relationships to some of the tenets and neighbors, yet she herself was not a biological mother. This is a way in which Addams was queer for her time: not married, not child-bearing, and yet invoking these social scripts in her actions with the Hull House. This exemplifies how the queerness of the self can queer its surroundings, both material and social.

\textsuperscript{25} I draw attention to this to emphasize that queering can take place without the intention to do so.

\textsuperscript{26} Jackson, “Toward a Queer Social Welfare Studies,” 173.
Queerness in others broadens our experiences that inform problem-solving and make habits more adaptive. This is part of what Addams advocates in gaining a “democratic interest in life”: engaging oneself in diverse experiences and with peoples of discrete circumstances. In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams writes that “most of the misunderstandings of life are due to partial intelligence, because our experiences have been so unlike that we cannot comprehend each other.” Recognizing the queer, dynamic totality of another self can challenge or destabilize my own self-conception. This is what Addams describes as others’ ability to reveal our own prejudices in understanding. Since all selves have discrete backgrounds and their own structuring and mobilization of habits, what is presuppositional in someone else’s framework may deviate from our own. As Seigfried explains,

> since individuals are unique and differently situated, with different histories, interests, and values, they will most likely not even agree on what is problematic in a situation [or what is queer about a situation]… Communication is needed, not just to resolve moral dilemmas, but to formulate them in the first place. What counts as an acceptable solution will vary according to the interests and values of the participants involved.

We have discrete circumstances and relations that frame our situations and ourselves; the tools and data that we have at hand – our capacities, access to resources, communal support – vary. Engaging diverse, queer others can queer our perspective by embodying alternative readings of actions and events. Such queering occurs because, as selves, each of us is queer.

### 3.3 The Performative Self through a Pragmatic Lens

Having queered the social self, let us now consider possible transactions of queer theory and pragmatism anew by reading the performative self in terms of the social self. For Butler, the

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27 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 44.
self is a process of concurrent self-creation and self-expression within an already established language of norms, practices, and expectations. Butler writes:

… the “I” that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the “I” becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this “I” fully recognizable. There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human.\(^{29}\)

We are constituted by norms and depend on them. In Dewean terms, I develop my characteristic habits in transaction with a material and social environment that is already inscribed by certain gender customs. In Mead’s terminology, the set of social habits that constitute me, that “I” depend on, is “me.” But “I” choose how to embody and respond to them; in this way, I live in a critical and transformative relation to them. “I” am not exhausted by any collection of norms or social habits. And to this extent, “I” am unknowable; what appears in social transaction is “me.”

Insofar as I elude full signification in terms of any the norms that inscribe me and my environment, I mobilize social habits, adapt them to new ends, and project new significations. In “Doing Justice to Someone,” Butler writes:

On the one hand, we have a self-description, and that is to be honored. These are the words by which this individual gives himself to be understood. On the other hand, we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves… So that when one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before.\(^{30}\)

We speak a language that is already speaking; in this way, we express ourselves by referencing and embodying some socially established meaning or norm. Yet we may speak this language in a way that is not how it has been spoken before. We create ourselves in these attempts at self-expression and in so doing variably re-instantiate and deconstruct the meanings we employ. My

\(^{29}\) Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 3-4.
\(^{30}\) Butler, “Doing Justice to Someone,” in *Undoing Gender*, 69.
act of self-creating-enacting holds the possibility of *queering* these meanings. I play out many social norms, references, and codes in my lived embodiment; there is no way that this cacophony repeats any of these norms completely. As Butler says in “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” my performances do not “exhaust the ‘I’.”[^31] Think of Mead’s “I” here. I am never entirely calculable because I always stand at a distance from the social meanings that convey me. There is always something queer about me in that I am not reducible to the norm, or even to an expansive set of norms.

The dynamic unity of the self, taken as a processual whole, is odd, strange, out of place in relation to operative cultural norms. My standing in the vast intersection of these norms diverges from any other person’s situation within the same language of gender, of personhood. As the lived, embodied interpretation of meanings, I hold the potential to problematize these meanings, to make them appear out of place, to live them in a way not spoken before. Taking the social self as our framework, we reveal that what it is to be a self is *to be queer*.

### 3.4 Similar Claims

I do not expect this to be an intuitive conclusion. However, it is not far off from the claims of several of the gender theorists whose work I already reference in these pages. In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker defines trans broadly as “the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place.”[^32] This presents an alternative vocabulary for expressing the idea of queering notions that are engrained to the point of being presuppositional, taken to be necessary, or natural.[^33]

[^32]: Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1. Italics in original.
[^33]: It stands outside the scope of this project to discuss the intricacies of the relation between transgender studies and queer studies. Nor do I intend to advocate one verbiage over the other. My intention is simply to emphasize other
More boldly, Kate Bornstein argues that we are all transsexual in the sense that, in developing our genders, we each play with the boundaries of man and woman.

There’s a myth in our culture that defines transsexuality as rare, and transsexuals as oddities. But nearly everyone has some sort of bone to pick with their own gender status, be it gender role, gender assignment, or gender identity... We’re most of us – whether ‘transsexual’ or not – dissatisfied. Some of us have less tolerance for the dissatisfaction, that’s all.\(^3^4\)

A few pages later, Bornstein continues: “A more political answer [to the question ‘Who is a transsexual?’] might be, ‘Anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself.’\(^3^5\) I share Bornstein’s intuition that all of us must negotiate the boundaries of gender identification, whether we do so more tractably or reflectively. Whereas it leads Bornstein to propose ubiquitous transsexuality, I argue for queerness.

Similarly, Jack Halberstam strongly claims: “There are no transsexuals. We are all transsexuals.”\(^3^6\) In *Female Masculinity*, he amends this position:

We are not all transsexual, I admit, but many bodies are gender strange to some degree or another, and it is time to complicate on the one hand the transsexual models that assign gender deviance only to transsexual bodies and gender normativity to all other bodies, and on the other hand the hetero-normative models that see transsexuality as the solution to gender deviance and homosexuality as a pathological perversion.\(^3^7\)

Like Halberstam, my project aims to acknowledge the pervasiveness of “gender strange” bodies. I expressed this idea above when I argued that we queer gender norms in embodying them. Also like Halberstam, my project calls for queering a gender system that polarizes transsexuality as gender deviant and the dimorphic genders of men and women as strictly normative.

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\(^3^4\) Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 118.
\(^3^5\) Ibid., 121.
\(^3^6\) Halberstam himself quotes this earlier work in *Female Masculinity*, 153.
\(^3^7\) Ibid., 153-154.
Finally, though Rosi Bradotti critiques queer theory for its notion of queerness,\(^{38}\) her characterization of nomadic subjects resonates with my conception of the queer self. Braidotti explains that the nomadic subject does not stand for homelessness or compulsive displacement: it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. It expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes without an essential unity.\(^{39}\)

The nomadic subject and the queer self both denote fluidity, eschew fixity, or, to adopt Braidotti’s iteration of Deleuze, deterretorialize how gender norms apply to different bodies and different subjectivities. Braidotti explains feminist knowledge as an “interactive process… [that] ‘determinitorializes’ us, i.e., it estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known and casts an external light upon it…”\(^{40}\) The same can be said of the self rendered queer. When we recognize its queerness, or when the queerness of another confronts us, applications of gender become strange or appear in a strange way. Instead of operating under habit, we reveal the conditions of intelligibility that have become presuppositional. They become other to us in a way that they can then become an object of scrutiny rather than the necessary, presupposed framework for our subjectivity.

### 3.5 Benefits and Implications

There are several benefits to conceiving the social self as queer. First, naming all selves queer is a way of recognizing affinity between discrete peoples and thus fostering mutual interests, which Addams identifies as necessary for political reform. As Addams writes, “In order to make fifty thousand people, so heterogeneous in nationality, religion, and customs, agree upon

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\(^{38}\) See Chapter One, “Queer Concerns,” for a discussion of Braidotti’s critiques.

\(^{39}\) Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 57.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 16.
any demand, it must be founded upon universal experiences which are perforce individual and not social.”

The demand to recognize others’ queerness will be effective only insofar as we can motivate individuals’ personal need for queerness to be legitimized, positively sanctioned, and, in a sense, normalized. Insofar as we can acknowledge the ways in which we, ourselves, are queer, we become personally invested in making our shared environment one that accommodates queerness. When I recognize queerness as not something merely other, but as central to what I am as a self as well, then I am more sympathetic to others’ queerness.

Second, the queer self is dynamically both process and product. I borrow this language from Dewey’s description of a work of art, which is a processual whole, denoting the undifferentiated experience of observer-object. Dewey writes: “It is no linguistic accident that ‘building,’ ‘construction,’ ‘work,’ designate both a process and its finished product. Without the meaning of the verb that of the noun remains blank.”

We are in such relation with ourselves: I am both observer and object, both “I” and “me.” I am both what is creating and what is created. Applying this analogy further, Dewey describes art as the “union of the generic, recurrent, ordered, established phase of nature with its phase that is incomplete, going on, and hence still uncertain, contingent, novel, particular…” In the same paragraph, he describes art as the presentation of “unexpected combination, and the consequent revelation of possibilities hitherto unrealized.” The same can be said of the queer self. Insofar as we are the unique interpenetration of our habits, a dynamic unity that adapts in transaction with our surroundings, we are both process and product. We identify with certain norms based on the current product of

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41 Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, 100.
43 Ibid., 359.
what we are, but we can also acknowledge that our relation to these identifications have the potential to become otherwise or signify otherwise in the future.

Conceiving of the self as both process and product allows us a schema of self that avoids essentialism and/or foundationalism. It means that we make very few (if any) claims about the necessity or inherent nature of certain bodies having certain traits and instead see these traits as products of our transactions with our world. This answers a strain of critiques in feminist philosophical writings. In the introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes

> …when an individual or a group of individuals is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he or they *are* inferior. But the scope of the verb *to be* must be understood; bad faith means giving it a substantive value, when in fact it has the sense of the Hegelian dynamic: *to be* is to have become, to have been made as one manifests oneself.44

Monique Wittig similarly critiques the practice of taking contingent products of socialization as necessary foundation: “A materialist feminist approach shows that what we take for the cause or origin of oppression is in fact only the *mark* imposed by the oppressor: the ‘myth of woman.’”45 Dewey himself terms such a theoretical move the philosophical fallacy, i.e. attributing the outcome of specific events as the causal foundation.46 As an alternative, conceiving the relationship between self and gender as product-in-process enables us to recognize the adaptability and changeability of our notions of gender. In turn, it becomes possible to better accommodate the fluidity of gender in lieu of holding fast to the idea that there is a *Truth* to gender in general and to one’s gender in particular.

Thirdly, identifying the self as queer denotes that it is thoroughly social, but also not thereby socially *determined*. Mead explains:

> The fact that all selves are constituted by or in terms of the social process… is not in the least incompatible with… the fact that every individual self has its own peculiar

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45 Monique Wittig, “One is Not Born a Woman,” in Abelove et. al., 104. Italics in original.
individuality… because each individual self within that [social] process, while it reflects in its organized structure the behavior pattern of that process as a whole, does so from its own particular and unique standpoint within that process… 47

This is another way of explaining the possibility of subversion even though, as Butler puts it, we cannot abandon performativity and the reliance on gender norms in legitimating identity. Our reliance on the language of norms does not prohibit the self from being queer.

A fourth benefit is that this notion of the self takes queer lives as models of knowledge rather than exceptions or anomalies that must be explained. When we use a pragmatic methodology for handling queer questions and issues, we commit ourselves to theorizing from within and in response to concrete queer situations. This shifts inquiry away from “How do we normalize these individuals into the normative frameworks we have?” – frameworks such as gender dimorphism, hegemonic masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality – and towards the question of “How do we adapt our frameworks for better adaptability and revisability in making sense of diversely embodied individuals?”

Fifth, the queer self undoes the notion that any gender is associated with just one type of body. In “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” Sandy Stone critiques gender systems that differentiate bodies based on whether their morphologies include a penis. Within such a system, “only one body per gendered subject is ‘right.’ All other bodies are wrong.” 48 As an alternative, recognizing all selves as queer problematizes the notion that genders entail certain morphologies. This would benefit intersex individuals insofar as it undoes the notion that they must undergo extensive surgeries that are medically unnecessary, often compromise or foreclose

47 Mead, Mind, Self, & Society, 201.
sexual pleasure, and leave individuals feeling damaged, “mutilated, not fully human.” It also
makes space for individuals who identify as trans yet have no desire to alter their bodies with
surgery or hormone therapy. More generally, decoupling morphologies from particular genders
benefits anyone whose body does not meet ideal standards of dichotomized femininity or
masculinity.

All of the preceding benefits collectively implicate one final benefit: the possibility of
lessening violence against those whose lives are denigrated for being queer. Think of the
violence done to homosexuals who are dehumanized by the slur “fag;” women who are told that
they are not really lesbians, they just need a good “fuck”; the many transgender individuals who
have been beaten and killed because they are labeled as deceptive, lying about their bodies;
biological men and women who are derogatively read as trans because their appearance does not
meet the standards of rugged masculinity or the physical allure of femininity. When we
acknowledge the discontinuities in our own genders, the ways in which they do not meet some
standard or ideal, or how we incorporate attributes that are masculine and feminine and
ambiguous, we problematize any easy binary of “us” versus “them.”

3.6 Possible Objections (and Responses)

While my proposal promises many advantages, I also anticipate many contentions. And
as Dewey reminds his readers, the worth of a claim lies in its capacity to alleviate perplexities
rather than occasioning more problems. As such, I will use the remaining space in this chapter
to respond to what I take to be the most challenging and/or salient objections to the queer self.

49 In the 1996 documentary, Hermaphrodites Speak!, one woman describes the feeling of being “damaged goods”
after having ‘normalizing’ surgery. After obtaining her medical records, Cheryl Chase describes her experience as
50 Cf. Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 90.
Briefly, I see four: [1] it co-opts queerness from already marginalized peoples; [2] it essentializes a new notion of self; [3] not everyone will accept identifying as queer; and [4] other descriptors of selfhood would be less contentious and therefore more effective.

3.6.1. Co-Opting Queerness

I start with potentially the most injurious problem for my thesis. According to this objection, arguing that all selves are queer co-opts queerness from those individuals who historically have been marginalized as queer. Further, in taking away the specificity of the term, it allows hegemonic groups to claim queerness as their own with positive connotations that have not been afforded to LGBTQIA+ individuals.

As noted in Chapter One, “Queer Concerns,” critics already worry that current applications of the term hierarchize queer identities. Sheila Jeffreys contends that queer theory developed from and centers around gay men’s experiences and, as such, ‘queer’ alienates lesbians rather than offering them adequate representation. Susan Stryker disputes the term insofar as it names gay and lesbian experiences but misrepresents transgender individuals by theorizing trans-identification as a matter of sexuality. These critics (and others) argue that some homogenous group becomes the standard of queerness through which all LGBTQIA+ identities are theorized and understood.

Extending queerness further to include all selves creates the parallel possibility of already-privileged groups claiming the hegemonic position for signifying queerness. This re-instantiates normality under the name of queerness instead of extending recognition and legitimacy to currently marginalized identities. For illustration, consider fashion trends that are denigrated in black or Latino contexts, yet celebrated when appropriated by white artists or

celebrities. Acceptance of the trend when embodied by already-accepted bodies does not mean that similar acceptance extends to those bodies that generate the trend. Rather, we compartmentalize conceptual frameworks and continue subjugating those on the margins to gain power, opportunities, and mobility for ourselves. Operating within this schema, simply appropriating queerness for normalized bodies does not itself normalize queer bodies.

My rejoinder to this objection is that the queer self remains accountable to LGBTQIA+ individuals and their experiences insofar as what allows for the recognition of the self as queer is the prior recognition of concrete queer identities in this narrow sense. As already argued, what allows me to question my gender habits and other presuppositional frameworks is that I experience them as queer(ed) in relation to others. We think in order to get ourselves out of a problem. In our currently gendered situation, LGBTIA+ lives problematize the relationship between gender constructions and selfhood by transgressing the compulsory order of sex, gender, and desire. Insofar as these identities are queer – appearing out of place, disorienting, or problematic – they make visible the mechanisms by which we produce and maintain gender. Queer secondness poses an interruption in habitual thinking, an impetus to redirection. In making the mechanisms of gender visible, we can inquire about how and why we conceive them the way that we do, and potentially redefine our constructions to be more adaptive.

We identify aspects of ourselves that are queer because we acknowledge our concurrent similitude and discreteness with the queerness of others. In a pseudo-Hegelian way, I gain the ability to recognize queerness in myself only once I recognize queerness in others who nonetheless resemble me. For Hegel, a subject gains self-consciousness through mutual recognition with another consciousness. Something similar happens in gaining consciousness of our own queerness; we first recognize it in another. Butler describes the first encounter of subject
and Other as one in which the former experiences the latter as “absorbing” or “consuming” the subject. My account diverges in that I do not propose that we lose ourselves in the Other in the sense of seeing such a complete identification between them and ourselves. However, we lose ourselves in the sense of seeing elements of ourselves made foreign or made to appear out of place - looking queer - in someone else. We lose our footing, or feel disconnected from ourselves, when we experience what Butler describes as the “groundlessness of this ground.”

When some gender norm is queered we recognize that it is not as natural/necessary as we supposed. I resonate with the other, which allows me partial understanding of them; I recognize both those parts of their selfhood that reflect my own and those aspects that make those familiar bits of me look out-of-place. Such experiences are those that Addams describes as both individual and revealing of our “basic likeness” as beings.

Further, identifying the self as queer cautions that, in relating with other people, there is something that eludes our understanding and challenges our habitual conceptions. Recognizing others as queer in relation to ourselves creates space for them to give an account of themselves and their situation. It reminds us that we are not masters of the designations of a term or an identification. When someone describes themselves as a teacher, feminine, transgender, non-binary, etc., none of these should be understood as denoting a univocal meaning. Pedagogies vary, even within the same discipline; standards of femininity vary across times and cultures. Insofar as these terms have shifting, contextual, and contentious meanings, one of our primary intellectual habits should be a general openness to revising our understanding of terms based on our transactions with individuals who embody them variously.

54 Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, 66.
3.6.2. Essentializing a New Sense of Self

The heart of this objection is that my theory creates a new essentialism of the self as social and queer. However, using the framework of the social self and, as a result, describing it as queer does not ascribe anything substantial or essential in the sense of predicating some substance that is the self.

As Dewey explains in “The Inclusive Philosophic Idea,” everything that exists bears the marker of being in association.\(^{55}\) The ways in which something associates with other things is what it defines it as the type of thing that it is. Characterizing the self as social acknowledges that our relations and transactions with other similarly socially-constituted selves makes us who, what, and how we are. However, relations change; dispositions and habits can change; though we say that the self is social, it is also dynamic. In other words, the ways in which we are social or what forms this sociality takes cannot be essentialized.

Similarly, queerness is \textit{situational} and \textit{revisable}. What we take to be queer can and does change over time and situation. As Butler writes, it is “impossible to sustain… mastery over the trajectory of those categories [e.g. gender identifications] within discourse.”\(^{56}\) We cannot fully account for the ways in which a term — such as queerness — will be appropriated and deployed in the future. In no way do I propose that LGBTIA+ identities as understood now will be the pinnacle of what we identify as queer for all time. What ‘endures’ is the idea that the self is out of place, at odds with, or in some sense dissonant with predominant social norms. What it means to be out of place will not have the same referent for all contexts. In that sense, the queer self curtails essentializing any one notion of queerness.

\(^{56}\) Butler, “Critically Queer,” 19.
If critics maintain that this describes an essence — that the queer self is dynamic, processual, and always in changing relation with its material and social surroundings — then I am not bothered by this esoteric use of the term. It does not rigidify queerness, but rather allows for the evolution of conceptions of queerness, selfhood, and so on. However, if this is how we are using the term, then this objection is inconsequential to the aims of my thesis.

3.6.3. Refusing Queerness

Not all selves do or would identify as queer. For my purposes, this objection pertains to individuals who deny the efficacy of ‘queerness’ for describing their lived experiences of marginalization due to factors of sex, gender, race, sexuality, and/or class. Patricia Hill Collins explains that she does not use queer as a descriptor for black LGBT individuals, since they do not identify with the term.\textsuperscript{57} Collins discusses reasons for this disassociation: queerness is often associated with whiteness and some black communities eschew coming out to protect already subjugated and objectified identities.\textsuperscript{58} As noted under the first objection, Stryker dismisses the inclusivity of the term because it takes gay and lesbian experiences as paragons of queerness and marginalizes trans voices. Though queerness poses as an inclusive umbrella term for creating commonality among diverse identities, critics charge that it privileges some voices while leaving others marginalized.

However, I am not proposing a totalized theory nor do I suggest that this is the only conceptual framework that sense of the self. We need dialogues that bridge conceptual frameworks and allow for discrete ways of viewing, living, and theorizing the world. As Maria Lugones expresses in her prologue to “Have We Got a Theory for You!,” the desire is not to

\textsuperscript{57} Patricia Hill Collins, \textit{Black Sexual Politics} (New York: Routledge, 2004), fn. 23, p. 323.
speak with one another in some universal language. Rather, we should find ways to speak in one another’s voices.

Within this project, I allude to a few alternative vocabularies that could work in tandem with the queer self. Braidotti develops a conception of *nomadic subjects* as deterretorialized, moving across boundaries, and not properly being said to belong to any one place or category. Braidotti frames this in terms of Deleuzian becoming, “the affirmation of a positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation.” She further describes the subject as “a term in a process of intersecting forces (affects), spatiotemporal variables that are characterized by their mobility, changeability, and transitory nature.” Much of this translates to my characterization of the queer self. Where Braidotti develops her conception of self within a Deleuzian framework, I begin within a pragmatic one. Nomadic subjects are produced by their spatiotemporal, evolving, and thus transitory, variables. The social (and queer) self is defined by habits that adapt to its situation and various transactions with an ever-changing social and material environment.

Intersectionality, such as presented by Collins and/or hooks, offers another possibly beneficial framework for queerness. I describe the self as the unique interpenetration of habits in transaction with an ever-evolving situation. Intersectionality defines an individual’s standpoint as a *communal* perspective, a product of intersecting social identities that inscribe their being. Collins defines a standpoint as “group knowledge, recurring patterns of differential treatment,” such as the “legacy of struggle” that defines black women’s situation in the United States. Intersectionality emphasizes processes of critique and revision based on how a group’s

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59 Lugones and Spelman, “Have We Got a Theory for You!,” 573.
61 Ibid., 247.
marginalized situation allows its constituents to see inequities that are invisible to those in privileged positions. hooks argues for the inalienable value of black women’s experience:

Black women with no institutionalized “other” that we may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress often have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology. This lived experience may shape our consciousness in such a way that our world view differs from those who have a degree of privilege (however relative within the existing system). It is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony.  

This resonates well with Addams’ insistence that those in disadvantaged situations are uniquely positioned to see the workings of social dynamics: “…no one so poignantly realizes the failures in the social structure as the man at the bottom, who has been most directly in contact with those failures and has suffered the most.”  

I do not propose that being queer is analogous to black women’s situation nor to any other marginalized group’s systematic oppression. Rather, my argument aligns with intersectionality insofar as I propose that we queer our perspectives, reveal our own prejudices, by taking others’ accounts of our shared environment as points of knowledge. In queering rigid significations, we open more varied possibilities for a livable life.  

It is also not the purpose of this project to advocate for the efficacy of these alternative models of self. Nor do I claim that these theoretical models — the queer self, nomadic subjects, intersectionality — are coextensive in motivation, aims, or who they represent. Within the context of responding to this objection, my point is to grant that there are alternative efficacious models of self that can accommodate queerness. The queer self promotes improved recognition of LGBTQIA+ individuals and rethinking gender constraints more generally. Models of self that develop within alternative situations and take other voices as the starting point for theorizing will

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63 hooks, Feminist Theory, 16.
64 Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House, 110.
develop other theoretical languages. This does not preclude the potential for these discourses to speak with one another.

3.6.4. More Serviceable Alternatives

This challenge relates to the previous objection: I could achieve my aims by describing the self as ‘unique’ or ‘creative’ and thus avoid the ambiguity, contentiousness, and other baggage associated with the term ‘queer.’ Describing the self as unique captures the incommensurability of selves in their backgrounds, perspectives, and characteristic interpenetration of habits. Calling it creative similarly captures the dynamism of the self, its ability to re-signify terms, and innovate social institutions. Furthermore, these alternatives promise several benefits. First, both have ready positive connotations. In comparison, ‘queer’ has prominent and well-worn negative connotations. Second, these alternatives have suitably malleable meanings with applications that appear intuitive to audiences both inside and outside of academia. It is less obvious whether an appropriately nuanced understanding of queerness is accessible to popular audiences. This is particularly important insofar as any pragmatically efficacious term should be able to speak to peoples of diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, class, gender, education, and so on. Thus, alternative descriptors accomplish my aims while avoiding the negative connotations and contentiousness of queerness. However, neither of these terms do adequately serve my purposes; much is lost in adopting these more apolitical terms. I affirm a stronger claim than simply describing the self as unique or creative in nature. Certainly, these descriptors are central to what it means to be a (queer) self. We create ourselves in how we choose and respond to our experiences. We are unique in how we embody (and en- mind) habits; our stock of experiences and how we respond to them are incommensurable with anyone else’s.
Yet, uniqueness too easily emphasizes the individual over the sociality of the self. Queerness necessarily implicates its relation to normality, which in turn implicates the social situation that poses these things as queer versus normal. Additionally, though uniqueness has positive connotations, being unique is not always positive. It is possible to stand out in such a way that disadvantages the individual, such as being the only woman in a male-dominated profession or a Latinx student in a predominantly white classroom. Whereas ‘unique’ generally promises positive evaluation, ‘queer’ identifies the risk involved in standing out from the norm. Parallel arguments can be made for favoring ‘queerness’ above ‘creativity.’

Furthermore, it is possible to motivate diverse audiences to identify features about themselves that deviate from common perception and/or expectation. My students easily identify what actions and performances align with which side of the feminine/masculine dichotomy; they are also quick to list counterfactual instances. Seldom are students unable to think of at least one of their behaviors that socially aligns them with a different gender. Therein lies the foothold for motivating the intuition that queerness is not as queer as commonly conceived. Therein lies the neutral ground that begins to build a nebulous likeness between normative and queer, habitual and problematic.

Rendering queerness more visible and accessible is worthwhile insofar as it builds bridges and reveals resonances among divergent discourses and groups of people. Because of the fraught history of the term ‘queer,’ there is more at stake in claiming the term than if I appealed to the more neutral descriptors of uniqueness or creativity. As Addams writes in Twenty Years at Hull House, the commonality of humanity can outweigh its differences:

…in the words of Canon Barnett, that the things that make men alike are finer and better than the things that keep them apart, and that these basic likenesses, if they are properly
accentuated, easily transcend the less essential differences of race, language, creed, and tradition.\textsuperscript{65}

There is much to be gained in illustrating the ways in which humanity shares in queerness. In naming the self queer, we recognize both our commonality — there is something queer about all of us — and our difference. We acknowledge our relatedness and hence our ability to challenge, enlighten, and evolve with one another.

\textsuperscript{65} Addams, \textit{Twenty Years at Hull-House}, 66.
CHAPTER 4. RECONSTRUCTING QUEER CONCERNS

Here it is enough to note that notions, theories, systems, no matter how elaborate and self-consistent they are, must be regarded as hypotheses. They are to be accepted as bases of actions which test them, not as finalities.¹

I began this project by taking LGBTIA+ lives as the starting point for theorizing, looking particularly that issues that arise when we attempt to give an account of the self. Employing pragmatic methodologies, I offered the social self as a framework for thinking about queer selves. Yet, when we applied these methods to queer issues, we thereby queered our notion of the social self. The self is the dynamic process-product which navigates and orchestrates multiple memberships, demands, and enacts various norms, ideals, and values. The nature of this transaction is such that my social/material environment lends the means by which I make sense of, articulate, enact, and legitimate myself. This is a mutually adjusting relationship; my making sense of, articulating, and enacting of self transforms the environment which sustains and legitimates me. The self, by nature – or, if you prefer, by lack of nature – is queer.

Now we return to those issues that occasioned our inquiry. The test of a good hypothesis is that it leads us truly; that is satisfies the problem which occasioned inquiry; that it answers the needs of the situation. As Addams writes, “the accumulation of knowledge and the holding of convictions must finally result in the application of that knowledge and those convictions to life itself.”² As such, we now return to queer (LGBTIA+) lives to measure the success of our theorizing. We may judge our thesis as successful to the extent that it alleviates those problems discussed in our first chapter. Working within queer theory, I took the most salient challenges in

¹ Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 83.
² Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, 33.
formulating a self that recognizes queerness to be: [1] deconstructing the self in such a way that permits political efficacy; [2] defining queerness more expansively than conflating it with non-normative sexuality; [3] permitting identifications significance in some capacity; and [4] accounting for the significant role that the body plays in trans experiences. To the extent that the queer self relieves perplexity and enables us in our aims of better recognizing LGBTIA+ selves, we show it to be valid, true, and valuable. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how my queered notion of the social self answers each of the above problems and thus furnishes us with an operable and recognizable framework of queer selfhood.

4.1 Reconstructing the Subject

A common theme in queer theory is the deconstruction of the subject, including an interrogation of the criteria and presumptions by which we bestow subjectivity. Critics charge that the trouble with this deconstructive project is that it leaves us without a politically effective or recognizable notion of the self. Insofar as queer theory destabilizes the subject, it puts into question how to talk about issues that appear particular to different types of subjects. This includes the issue that subjectivity and personhood have been historically differently attributed to different groups and thus how these groups have been systemically disadvantaged because of such attribution.

Within the preceding pages, I offer a notion of self that emerges from the pragmatic tradition rather than postmodern critique. If the contention is that ridding ourselves of a substantive notion of self leaves us with no recognizable notion of self, pragmatism curtails this worry. Whereas postmodernists describe the self as a ‘fiction’ or ‘illusion,’ pragmatists articulate the self as plastic, multiply transacting with its environment, and thus evolving in its signification. It is a provisional product of its past transactions and it projects itself forward on
this basis, adapting its constitutive habits and dispositions to meet new situations and ends. The self is a hub of experiences, characterized by the dynamic totality that is its habits, dispositions, capabilities, and myriad relations to its world.

There is a reality or truth to the self, but this reality does not precede the working-out of the self. Borrowing from Dewey, reality is not “ready-made and final [but rather] that which has to be accepted as the material of change…”\(^3\) Or as Beauvoir puts it, we are always engaged in projecting ourselves in a certain way, creating a presence for ourselves in the world. This very projection *is* the meaning which we make of ourselves, a meaning which we make *with others*. An experience that is both uniquely our own, of which we are sovereign, and shared with others, subject to the conditions of our situation. This is another way of talking about the transaction of self and environment that Dewey stresses as the most basic nodule of experience.

Our original concern was in finding a notion of self that concurrently accomplishes two things. First, it eludes fixed definitions and does justice to the full range of queerness. Second, such a notion of self enables us to recognize selves that share common experiences, alienations, and/or ways of transacting with the world *and* enables such groups toward political action and social transformation. I will return to the first point in our discussion of how to define queerness (that is, the second objection/challenge). Similarly, I will address how to recognize a collective of queer selves in discussing queer theory’s troubled relationship with identifications (the third challenge). At this point, I would like to highlight a benefit of adopting pragmatism to reconstruct queer subjects: both Addams and Dewey already offer concrete programs for reconstructing our sociopolitical landscape to better recognize and support queerness.

\(^3\) Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 70.
4.1.1 Strategy 1: Reorganize the Environment(s)

Since the personal and the social are inextricably linked, engendering change in individuals requires some reorganization of the environment. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey writes: “To change the working character or will of another we have to alter objective conditions which enter into his habits.” These ‘objective’ conditions include the physical/material as well as social institutions that permeate these materials and structure our sociality. In other words, re-working how we think about the self entails reconstructing the material and social institutions that foster, create, and sustain the self. Addams similarly argues for institutional support to sustain changes that smaller groups wish to engender for better recognition. This was precisely the purpose of the Hull House settlement in Chicago: to embody a re-organization of space and the social customs that constituted it. Within the space, new types of relationships formed; altered modes of sociality enabled its inhabitants with different tools for building and expressing their personal talents, capabilities, and resources.

Within our contemporary context, we need ways of likewise restructuring our social environments to encourage different modes of apprehending gender. My first proposal is to diversify the models and images that populate various forms of media. Starting from an early age, we get a sense for what is normal and what is possible for different types of bodies by seeing representations in cartoons, storybooks, and the types of toys and imaginative play that are prescribed to one of two genders. These images normalize and reinforce what gender (race, class, etc.) codes are culturally recognizable and legitimated. Insofar as our aim is to create an environment that encourages greater recognition of diverse embodiments, we must have recourse to better representation of diverse embodiments.

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To diversify available representations, kids’ programming could include featured characters of different genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds. As of 2008, Cordelia Fine reports that only roughly a third of 20,000 children’s shows surveyed included female leads. I imagine the corresponding statistic for non-binary and otherwise queer characters is miniscule. Television shows could also include non-heterosexual couplings that are normalized within the show instead of used as a plot device. Even recently, we have witnessed moves towards diversifying images. We experienced triumph for Black communities with “Black Panther.” With a predominantly Black cast, the film proliferated more diverse depictions of powerful Black masculinity and femininity, all with notably positive connotations.

Children’s books could diversify the types of stories available with more variably gendered protagonists who sport a variety of interests and capabilities. Again, Fine cites that of recent Caldecott winners and runners-up: “males, overall, were featured nearly twice as often as females in title roles, and they appeared in about 50 percent more pictures.” Fine also notes that if the “bucking of gender stereotypes” is present in these books, it is most likely performed by female characters. The problem with this is that it reifies masculine traits and interests as most worthwhile and reinforces the idea that, as Fine puts it, “men are people, but women are women” (or, rather, boys are budding people, but girls are girls). Further, regardless of the predominance of female v. male characters, note that the question is still firmly situated within a presumed dichotomous system of gender.

Restructuring our environment could also include de-gendering public spaces. Within the last couple of years, Target de-gendered their toy aisles. Instead of organizing toys for ‘boys’ or

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5 Fine, “Gender Education,” in *Delusions of Gender*, 223.
6 Ibid., 222-223.
7 Ibid., 221.
8 Ibid., 223.
‘girls,’ they are now arranged based on the type of toy and the play/engagement it encourages. Yet, note that its effectiveness is undercut by the toys themselves being color-coded; their advertising still often features only one gender interacting with the toy. Girls’ toys are predominantly pastel tones whereas boys’ toys are almost unfailingly bright primary tones (this is charitably looking beyond the most basic pink/blue divide). This extends into adult life. Stroll down the aisle that sells razors and/or deodorants. Even if they are not clearly marked as ‘for men’ or ‘for women,’ you will find a clear demarcation in the coloring. We explicitly gender certain places – like bathrooms, clothing and toy aisles in department stores – and we adorn others with gendered items to create a more welcoming atmosphere for some groups rather than others. Physical spaces delimited as such reinforce the ever-present saliency of categorizing oneself along binary-gendered lines.

4.1.2 Strategy 2: Reform Education

Changes in the physical components of our environment occurs in tandem with changes to the social landscape of our environment as well. Thus, the second strategy that I offer from Dewey and Addams is to reform educational practices. Reorienting the classroom and its pedagogies can engender different habits and thus different individuals.

Dewey and Addams stress two methodological points in reorienting education. First, education is most successful when it equips the individual with habits for further education. This is because the tool promises to be useful in future situations and applications. Dewey writes:

The best thing that can be said about any special process of education… is that it renders its subject capable of further education: more sensitive to conditions of growth and more able to take advantage of them. Acquisition of skill, possession of knowledge, attainment of culture are not ends: they are marks of growth and means to its continuing.9

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This dovetails Dewey’s advocacy of developing more flexible and reflective habits. Intelligent habits are adaptive to changing circumstances and open to revision upon further experience; they acknowledge one’s fallibility. Second, Dewey and Addams stress starting with the situation of the individual – their background, interests, capabilities – rather than imposing a system of metrics from the outside. Addams describes employing an “evolutionary principle”:

We are at last learning to follow the development of the child; to expect certain traits under certain conditions; to adapt methods and matter to his growing mind. No “advanced educator” can allow himself to be so absorbed in the question of what a child ought to be as to exclude the discovery of what he is.\(^{10}\)

In a later chapter, Addams reiterates that “in education it is necessary to begin with the experiences which the child already has and to use his spontaneous and social activity…”\(^{11}\) In other words, education is most effective when it taps into existing experiences of the individual’s situation and provides tools for directing energies toward making use of their environment(s) according to their particular needs, interests, and ends.

Within the context of contemporary gender relations, the call for reformed education includes, for example, changing the discourses surrounding gender and sexuality from early ages. One of the aims of such reconstruction would be to acquaint individuals with a more diverse understanding of expressions of sex, gender, and sexuality. Another aim would be to recognize that gender expression changes in relation to the material and social conditions and that it evolves over time. We could incorporate more thorough (and age appropriate) teaching on sexual education. Rutgers advocates “Comprehensive Sexual Education” that begins in elementary school, as early as age four. This program is part of the regular curriculum in

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10 Addams, *Social Democracy and Ethics*, 32.
11 Ibid., 83.
Netherland classrooms. Some of the main goals of the program are to improve access to information, promote body image and assertiveness, and enable kids start to think about and identify welcome versus unwelcome intimacy. This is one way in which we can concretely integrate basic critical thinking courses in primary schools surrounding issues of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Connecting back to the first strategy, we can structure children’s early environments along non-gender-coded lines, emphasizing affinities and likenesses of character and/or habit rather than on morphological appearances. In *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine writes:

In the young child’s world, gender is the social category that stands out above all others, right from the start… boys and girls may be regularly labeled and organized (“Now it’s the boys’ turn to wash their hands”) by gender, especially in early education settings. And, unlike adults and older children, younger children don’t tend to have other social categories like *jock, doctor, Christian*, or *artist* with which to identify.

I have full faith in our intellectual prowess and imagination to be able to come up with groupings other than sex/gender. Schools often organize classrooms using desk clusters, which lends itself to smaller groupings of students that do not rely on sex-identifications (“Now it’s Cluster Four’s turn to wash their hands”).

The original charge was that queer theory struggles with accounting for the self in such a way that both (i.) allows for the fluidity/unfixity of queerness and (ii.) allows for collective political activity and recognition. If the contention is with queer theory *as postmodern critique* of selfhood, pragmatic methodologies offer both a framework for thinking selfhood (the social self) and concrete methods for engendering social change based on this conceptualization of self. Note

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14 Fine, *Delusions of Gender*, 228.
that none of my suggestions are especially novel. Many of these practices are already implemented. The more we overlap these strategies, the more effectively we set up an environment with institutions and habits that corroborate and strengthen one another. Since theory and practice are interdependent, my hope is that reconsidering and realigning dominant theory/ideals will better justify and support furthering these efforts.

4.2 The Problem(s) of Queerness

I advocate an expansive definition of the queerness to denote that which is odd, appearing out-of-place, and/or disruptive such that it requires a readjustment in how we experience the self. At my master’s thesis defense, one of my readers asked if this definition is, on the one hand, too queer and, on the other hand, not queer enough. Is my understanding of queerness idiosyncratic, too removed from its actual usage in practice? Alternatively, does its inclusivity permitted too much; have I stretched the term into insignificance? Most basically, these questions ask whether queerness is, at heart, about sexuality. I argue that it need not be and, furthermore, common usage of the term implicates broader significations.

4.2.1 Queerness and Sexuality

In my first chapter, I discuss the objection that ‘queerness’ is less inclusive than it poses itself to be. Critics charge that queerness represents, most visibly, gay males and misrepresents the specific dynamics and challenges of other LGBTQIA+ identities. However, if gay men’s lives appear to be paragons of queerness, this indicates the pervasiveness and perniciousness of patriarchy – irrespective of the perceived queerness and/or sexuality of the individuals involved – rather than any inherent shortcoming with the term itself. Associating queerness most closely with gay men’s experiences is another manifestation of our tendency to represent males as the
default, or to borrow from Beauvoir, to treat them as both the positive and the neutral. Marilyn Frye argues that gay males attempt to gain what power they can in the hegemonic hierarchy by perpetuating male dominance.\(^\text{15}\) That is, faced with possible emasculation, Frye argues that gay men reassert their masculinity – and thus their personhood – by appealing to their natural rights as males.\(^\text{16}\)

Countering this includes undoing an ideology of domination that conceives of selfhood as atomistic, competitive, and oppositional. Conceptualizing the self as queer, on the other hand, recognizes that we are socially constituted, dependent upon our various social relations, and that we better equip ourselves with more flexible habits by fostering a more empathetic interest in diverse people. In turn, this denies that we must dominate, that personhood must be based on a mastery of one’s surroundings, which includes other people. In short, decoupling gay male experiences and queerness occurs precisely in (i.) expanding the definition of queerness and (ii) reorienting how we think about personhood and agency. This is precisely my project.

The broader association of queerness with sexuality is a hasty generalization. Our use of terms such as ‘fag’ or ‘dyke’ indicates that queerness depends far more on gender cues rather than indicators of sexuality. In *Dude, You’re a Fag*, ethnographer CJ Pascoe explains how high school boys employ the term ‘fag’ to shore up their own masculinity. In her experience, students did not use ‘fag’ and ‘gay’ interchangeably. Rather, ‘fag’ was reserved for demeaning males who fell short of hegemonic masculine ideals of strength, mastery/dominance, and competence.\(^\text{17}\) Pascoe writes: “The *fag* epithet, when hurled at other boys, may or may not have explicit sexual meanings, but it always has gendered meanings. When a boy calls another boy a fag, it means he


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 131.

\(^{17}\) Pascoe, *Dude, You’re a Fag*, 57-59.
is not a man but not necessarily that he is a homosexual.” The use of the term functioned to secure the speaker’s masculinity by performatively marking the recipient of the term as lesser (less competent, authoritative, masculine).

Further, there are queer discourses that center around factors other than sexuality. Gloria Anzaldúa writes about the *mestiza*, a figure whose queerness comes from crossing national borders and cultural languages rather than crossing sexual boundaries. Though often omitted as a progenitor of queer theory, Anzaldúa’s earlier writings precede Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. In response to *Gender Trouble*, Butler received much criticism for developing queer theory on the grounds of privileging the heterosexual matrix in organizing identity. In contrast, Anzaldúa develops a notion of queerness that relies on plural identities, multiple boundary-crossings. As Ian Bernard writes in *Queer Race*, Anzaldúa’s work offers a significant example of “interpolating queerness from coloredness.”

These examples illustrate that queerness is not limited to sexuality. In our multiple uses of the term, it does not always function as identifying deviance from heterosexuality. If we maintain such an identification, we perpetuate certain sexualities as essentially aligned with certain gender expressions. But once we make this identification, we collapse the distinction between sex, gender, and desire and turn our backs on positively conceiving ways in which these three queerly relate.

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18 Ibid., 82.
19 Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler are most often cited, though Teresa de Lauretis is credited with coining the term ‘queer theory.’ It is likely noteworthy that all three authors are white, whereas Anzaldúa is Chicano.
4.2.2 The Significance of Queerness

If queerness need not be – and, indeed is not – tied to sexuality, the question becomes where to place the boundaries of queerness, however permeable, such that it does not become insignificant. The worry is that if queerness is indeterminate, then “anything goes.” As discussed in Chapter One, David Halperin challenges the “hegemony of queer theory” and cautions against applications of queerness that
despecify the lesbian, gay, bixexual, transgender, or transgressive content of queerness, thereby abstracting “queer” and turning it into a generic badge of subversiveness, a more trendy version of “liberal”: if it’s queer, it’s politically oppositional, so everyone who claims to be progressive has a vested interest in owning a share of it… [I]t becomes harder to figure out what’s so very queer about it…

I do divest queerness from its purportedly strict ties to sexuality and inclusively cast its signification such that it describes all selves. However, this does not entail that simply anything amounta to queerness, nor does it conflate queerness with subversion. Rather, interpreting queerness through a pragmatic lens furnishes criteria for delineating queerness while also remaining revisable.

(i.) That which is queer is problematic insofar as it both interrupts habit and reorients experience. I have loosely defined queerness as disruptive, challenging, threatening, and/or disorienting to rigidified routine. Yet, it is not merely odd or chaotic; it represents reorientation. It is problematic in a constructive way, challenging the operant regime of signification by embodying a livable alternative.

As Butler writes in Undoing Gender, the aim of critique is to find new ways to render life livable. She identifies her intentions in Gender Trouble as illuminating the intelligibility of

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22 Butler, Undoing Gender, 4.
lives that were already being lived (e.g. lesbian lives) and yet were not being legitimated within legal and otherwise political discourses.

I had two aims at the time: the first was to expose what I took to be a pervasive heterosexism in feminist theory; the second was to try to imagine a world in which those who live at some distance from gender norms, who live in the confusion of gender norms, might still understand themselves not only as living livable lives, but as deserving a kind of recognition.  

Note the definition of queer operant in this passage: those who live at a distance from gender norms and/or who live in the confusion of gender norms. As I argued in my previous chapter, this describes each of us to some degree. The nature of the social self is that it is composed of multiple identities/memberships, navigating environments which variously call forth different habitual responses. Each of us negotiates the social demands of conflicting norms. This further implies that we have the capacity to transform these meanings in our embodied iterations of the norm. As Butler writes in Gender Trouble, we can “mobilize possibilities of ‘subjects’ that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible.”

(ii.) There exist ‘objective’ constraints for queerness, in relation to the nature of our situation. The nature of the self as social delimits certain possibilities for how we might be in this world; this is always one of the objective conditions for our being in the world. What satisfies a situation depends upon not only the organism/self, but its co-constitutive environment. Dewey explains “…the satisfaction in question means a satisfaction of the needs and conditions of the problem out of which the idea, the purpose and method of action, arises. It includes public and objective conditions.” Insofar as we are thoroughly social beings, certain behaviors will not

23 Ibid., 207.
24 Butler, Gender Trouble, 40.
25 Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 90.
facilitate our being-with-others. Not all deviations from the norm are going to be livable, healthy, or serviceable for our purposes. Deviations that are, for example, harmful, destructive, violent, and/or exploitive will be among those that will not be sustainable.

(iii.) Queerness refers not to some trait in isolation, but rather the relation between sex, gender, and desire, wherein we understand that this relation is always complicated by its intersections with other social dynamics, including race, nationality, class, and (dis)ability. This criterion naturally follows from our preceding discussion regarding sexuality. Though queerness may stem most focally from one of these aspects of selfhood – such as sexuality – understood more holistically, queerness results from these characteristics’ interpenetration.

(iv.) When we call the self itself queer, we refer to the dynamic totality of the self rather than any of its compositional parts. It is their unique, lived embodied relation that makes some habit(s) appear discordant. Like a thumbprint, my interpenetration of habits is uniquely my own, but not merely in a privative sense. Identities are political, situated with personal aims and motivations, capable of destabilizing current notions, practices, institutions. We are all situated within circumstances that furnish or encourage certain aims/interests that color how we see and interact with our world. This implies both that social norms necessarily render me intelligible and that I am a lived example of how these social scripts may be reimagined and reconstructed. This is another articulation of second wave feminists’ refrain: “The personal is political.”

Taking together these four ‘boundaries’ of queerness, let us now return to Halperin’s charge that definitions of queerness like mine simply equate queerness with subversion. Even without maintaining a close association between queering and sexuality, I counter that queering names a type of subversion that relates to some presupposed understanding about the To the
extent that it subverts some rule about what we take to be pre-suppositional about *persons*, this is a case of subversion that is also queering.

Thus, the upshot of my response to this group of objections is twofold. First, *queer* necessarily designates an irresolvable plurality of senses that do not all include an association with sexuality. It will be *the nature of the situation* by which we understand what sense of queerness is operative. In some cases, we will want to retain the narrower scope of referring to LGBTIA+ individuals; in others, we intend a broader designation of that which appears out-of-place in a suggestively re-constitutive manner. Second, with regards selves, specifically, queerness names that characteristic interplay, negotiation, or balancing act between relying on one’s sociality (norms) and yet always standing at a distance from that sociality. Responding to Halperin’s concern directly, even without maintaining a close association between queering and sexuality, we can delineate the two insofar as queering names a *type* of subversion that relates to some presupposed understanding about the composition of the self in its sexed, gendered, and desiring embodiment. That is, to the extent that it subverts some rule about *personhood*, this is a case of subversion that is also queering.

### 4.3 Provisional and Dynamic Identifications

The third group of challenges concerns how to reconcile queer theory with whatever function identifications play in self- and social- recognition. In its strongest strains, queer theory belies the notion that there is anything substantive that can claim self-identity. This is part of Butler’s critique of the metaphysics of substance. More generally, we characterize queer theory as a critique of the pre-suppositional terms by which we define, allocate, and recognize personhood (such as sex, gender, and desire).
Identifications are disadvantageous to the extent that they are by nature exclusionary, draw boundaries that become rigidified, and create biases among its members. Within the opening pages of *Gender Trouble*, Butler addresses this as a limitation of identity politics. Any identification, such as the “category of woman” excludes individuals from its definition and/or fails to faithfully represent some of the individuals it claims, “inevitably generat[ing] multiple refusals to accept the category.” Anzaldúa, as well, emphasizes the power of identifications to alienate. She writes about her experiences as a Chicana feminist, a lesbian, living on the borderlands both geographically and culturally:

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. “Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings*. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.

You say my name is ambivalence?... Not so. Only your labels split me.

Anzaldúa speaks of multiple selves: how she identifies with none of them and that all of them are her. None of these identifications exhaust her, yet each of them names some aspect of her.

On the other hand, identifications function in how we recognize ourselves and others. We need some principle of identification to acknowledge groups which historically have been denied political recognition, power, and agency. This concerns the objection that deconstructing the subject leaves little room for political recognition. Identifications are instrumental in forming solidarity and collective action, in being able to speak ‘as’ a woman or ‘as’ a LGBTIA+ individual. We center our self-understanding around certain identifications and use them as

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guiding principles for transacting with our world. Identifying as a lesbian, a feminist, a woman, we thereby accept certain traits and norms as guiding how to transact with others.

The question is how to negotiate the irresolvable instability of the queer self with the identifications that necessarily frame and legitimate it. There is a necessary tension between having categories and realizing deviations within and from them. As Seigfried writes, “One must assume labels to act effectively and reject them in order to retain the dynamic sense of self that cannot be reduced to any one dimension.”

Categories are desirable and ‘necessary’ insofar as they help organize our world and provide conceptual shortcuts for quickly understanding our surroundings. Dewey explains:

To classify is, indeed, as useful as it is natural… Speaking generally, the purpose is to facilitate our dealings with unique individuals and changing events. When we assume that our clefts and bunches represent fixed separations and collections in rerum natura [in the nature of things], we obstruct rather than aid our transactions with things. We are guilty of a presumption which nature promptly punishes. We are rendered incompetent to deal effectively with the delicacies and novelties of nature and life.”

Insofar as they allow us to operate effectively within our world and form beneficial alliances with others, identifications lead us truly. However, to the extent that we treat them as natural or fixed we foreclose possibilities of transacting with our environment. Changes in our environment and our transaction with the environment instruct and prompt changes in our identifications. Gender identifications should (and occasionally do) continue to amend, change, and expand insofar as we get the sense that the identifications no longer ring true to our experiences of self and world.

Furthermore, we need to take seriously the multiplicity of identifications that define us and acknowledge that these identifications are relational. As Charlene Seigfried emphasizes, our

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relation to others is more complex that Beauvoir’s Self-Other paradigm or Mead’s relation to the Generalized Other.

Over time, selves and others in actual situations… form, re-form, make and unmake, who and what they are becoming. Relationships are not essentially dual nor univocal, but multiple and many-layered....

This pragmatic model of multiple relations in continuous, dynamic interplay runs counter to the common-sense view of the world as consisting of hard and fast divisions of every sort, from individual units or ‘things’ to nationalities, to species, to sexes, to towns, to countries, etc. The philosopher’s task, according to James, is to see “the familiar as if it were strange and the strange as if it were familiar.” … The pragmatist expression of this task is to smudge boundaries to challenge the ready-made world as a fiction, to make the world fluid again.30

This is one with the aims of queer theory: making the familiar appear strange and the strange familiar, challenging rigidified habit with the recalcitrant reminder of fluidity. To acknowledge that we have multiple identities that wax and wane in importance in varying environments; to recognize that our varying semblance with and distancing from certain identifications is in a flux of becoming — this is part of what I intend when I say that the self is queer.

4.4 Queer Body-Minds

The last group of challenges concerns how to do justice to trans experiences which seemingly imply that there is some nature or truth to the self and/or to the body. Let us consider three interrelated permutations of this challenge.

(1) First, trans narratives often center around finding one’s ‘true’ gender which deviates from the gender they were assigned at birth. This suggests that there is a truth about gender that transcends or precedes gender expression.

Second, one’s gender identity can conflict with their outward performances. This indicates that there exists something beyond/behind social transaction.

Third, at least some trans individuals need coherence in their sex and gender to feel legitimate or authentic. Put bluntly, this implies that sex is the bottom line of gender.

In responding to these, I especially rely on three features of pragmatism: (i.) the continuity of body-mind, (ii.) the multiplicity of the self, and (iii.) a pluralistic understanding of truth.

4.4.1 Embodying-Minding Habits

Firstly, I contest the dualisms that underlie these objections. They rely on distinctions between sex and gender, an inner sense of self and its outward performances, thought and action. Each of these expresses a duality of mind and body. But within a pragmatic framework, there is no hard and fast distinction between mind and body. Again, Dewey emphasizes their continuity:

…body-mind simply designates what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication and participation. In the hyphenated phrase body-mind, “body” designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature, inanimate as well as animate; while “mind” designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when “body” is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation.31

Mind is “the possession of and response to meanings.”32 We enact not simply some vehicle called body, but put into action certain meanings. Thought and action are continuous; thought is the internal rehearsal of a conversation to be had, of an action to be undertaken. Actions and undergoings are the content for thought, the fodder for reimagining the meanings currently set in the world.

Further, the personal is something that is internally rehearsed and yet to be worked-out in social discourse. As Dewey writes, “thought itself is conceived and developed in such terms as to be capable of communication to others, of understanding by them, and of adoption and utilization in cooperative action.”

Dewey also describes this movement between inner and outer, individual and universal:

To define one’s self within closed limits, and then to try out the self in expansive acts that inevitably result in an eventual breaking down of the walled-in self, are equally natural and inevitable acts… One no sooner establishes his private and subjective self than he demands it be recognized and acknowledged by others… And no person taught by experience ever escapes the reflection that no matter how much he does for himself, what endures is only what is done for others…

As Butler writes, gender is something we do with and for others. As I identify with a gender (or genders), I embody it in how I think and transact with the world. Thought engages the body, gains external expression, has a bearing in our comportment. Gendering the mind and gendering the body are not separate things insofar as mind and body are not separate.

There is continuity, as well, in the relationship between sex and gender. This does not mean that one precedes, legitimates, and/or undergirds the other. Rather, sex and gender have a mutually adjusting relationship. Our understanding of one informs our reading of the other and the two are inextricably linked. They interpenetrate one another much in the same way as body-mind. Depending on the situation (such as in the bio-chemistry lab) we might be able to more appropriately talk in terms of sex, and in others (such as in sociology where the focus is on human interaction) we are more appropriately addressing gender. If we understand that one does not precede or found the other, this curtails any inference that the continuity of body-mind and sex-gender entails that sex legitimates gender. The sticking point, however, is in explaining how,

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34 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 244.
despite this continuity, we can experience an acute disjuncture between the two. This is what loosely characterizes many trans experiences.

4.4.2 Multiple Me’s, Multiple Genders

The claim is that performativity cannot account for an internal sense of self being at odds with the performed gender. Proponents of this view often conclude, then, that there exists something beyond the social self. My first rejoinder to this is that, even if our inner sense of self conflicts with that which we outwardly convey, it does not follow that this inner sense is prior to or independent of sociality. Steven Fesmire argues this point:

In a multicultural setting, especially for those living on a hyphen between cultures, the “inner conversation” may be penetrated by clashing social habits. The resulting arts and intellectual probing are fresh and intense where conditions permit, but they are in no sense nonsocial productions.\(^{35}\)

In Dewean terms, the models of recognition that are available for articulating this inner sense are learned and adopted in social transaction. Or, as Mead describes, thought is “an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself” in terms of meanings and gestures adopted in social transaction.\(^{36}\)

More to the point for the objection at hand: the self is plural. I am irreducible to the various senses of “me” that appear socially in discrete contexts. Experiencing a disconnect between one’s inner sense of self and its outward appearances is not altogether alien to individuals who do not identify as trans. We are not always of one mind; this holds true for gender as well. As my multiple “me’s” appear in different social contexts, my gender expressions change as well. Butler expresses this by saying that none of our gender performances

\(^{35}\) Fesmire, “Habit and Character,” 11.
\(^{36}\) Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society*, 47.
exhaust the “I.” Hence, it may well be that any self is multiply gendered, in some contexts more masculine, in others more feminine, and in yet others intentionally queering any distinction.

This is a significant benefit of the pragmatic model for queer theory: that it allows for a multiplicity of selves in dynamic, adaptive unity. In *The Principles of Psychology*, James writes on a sense of personal identity amidst multiple selves:

…we feel the whole cubic mass of our body all the while, it gives us an unceasing sense of personal existence. Equally do we feel the inner ‘nucleus of the spiritual self’… the thought of them infallibly brings some degree of organic emotion…

A couple of pages later, James continues: “A uniform feeling of ‘warmth,’ of bodily existence (or an equally uniform feeling of pure psychic energy?) pervades [all of our selves]…” It is our feeling of fit, or at-homeness, that identifies our myriad selves. Perhaps this is another way of explaining trans individuals’ experiences of finding their true selves — it is a feeling of organic equilibrium with themselves, their body, and how they transact with their world. For those of us who predominantly feel at-home in our sexed and gendered selves, experiencing such disconnect and/or friction may be a foreign concept. Yet, I wager there is a good number of us who have, at one time or another felt at odds with our bodies, ourselves. This conception of self enables us to acknowledge both the fractured nature of the self, its inconsistencies, and a continuity to the self, something that endures, but not as a constant, not static. Within this model, rather than conceiving of trans individuals as somehow fraudulent or deceptive, we conceive of their struggle to find at-homeness in their gender as more intentional and reflective than individuals who do not question their gender identities.

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38 Ibid., 318.
Trans lives are hard to theorize largely because we culturally cling to two presumptions: (i.) we assume that the self is singular and static; and (ii.) the body is at-one with and indicative of a certain gender. In transaction with an environment thus constituted, we must resolve or determine any dissonant senses of gender into one gender category. In *The Politics of Reality*, Marilyn Frye explains:

> Individuals whose bodies do not fit the picture of exactly two sharply dimorphic sexes are often enough quite willing to be altered or veiled for the obvious reason that the world punishes them severely for their failure to be the “facts” which would verify the doctrine of two sexes.\(^3^9\)

The stakes of deviating are high and potentially injurious. There is often a threat of physical violence, social disadvantage, or of alienating themselves. These all encourage individuals to conceal that they are trans. It *compels* trans narratives into hushed tones; to identify as trans only clandestinely; to paradoxically erase that identity in order to legitimately embody the identity. Thus, we adapt lived experience to fit available theory rather than abiding by the pragmatic imperative to develop theory out of and accountable to practice.

The queer self proposes an alternative language of selfhood with the aim of opening new possibilities for legitimating and celebrating more varied embodiments, not only at the level of social recognition but also on the level of personal, self-recognition.\(^4^0\) It allows us to recognize greater deviancy and multiplicity not only in others, but also in how we regard and live ourselves. If we socially become more open to these possibilities, I conjecture that we would see more common, unabashed representations that do not align neatly with the currently normative mapping of (dimorphic) sex, (cis-)gender, and (hetero-)desire.

\(^4^0\) Here I allude to previous discussions on two of Butler’s points in “Doing Justice to Someone.” In writing about a language of personhood, I refer to Butler’s point that in our attempts at self-expression, “one speaks a language that is already speaking...” *Undoing Gender*, 69. This is the language through and by which we “recognize ourselves at the level of feeling, desire, and the body...” Ibid., 58.
4.4.3 Gendering Ourselves Truly

Trans narratives suggest there is a *truth* to gender that one comes to through whatever process of transition the individual undertakes (whether this includes hormonal and/or surgical modifications or not). However, we can talk in terms of *truths* about gender without suggesting that there is a *truth* to gender that is predetermined and/or that exists prior to our lived experience. Truth is plural and fallible. As Beauvoir writes, we validate meanings and values in how we take up and live them.\(^{41}\) Our embodying of social norms or gender-habits reifies them. As we concurrently create and understand ourselves, we grow into gender norms placed upon us, but we also vary these gender norms, create our own way of embodying them, perhaps contest them, queer them, or altogether abandon them. I find the ‘truth’ of my gender – I correctly self-identify – when I feel ‘at home’ in transacting with my world. Rather than experiencing a disconnect in body-mind, I find equilibrium in the gender habits that I enact and by which I feel I truly experience and express myself. In understanding gender this way, trans individuals’ experiences are just as intelligible and legitimate as any other gender narrative.

If we affirm the continuity of body-mind and the multiplicity of the self, we recognize a mutually adjustive relationship between sex and gender. Within our current situation, the dominant paradigm is that the body matches the gender expression. This compulsory mapping of sex and gender is *normativizing*; it influences the way in which we recognize ourselves, offering only a narrow picture of what is possible for the body. If, in the end, the body is what legitimates gender, this is so because we have the socially-reified *custom* of conflating sex and gender. If we

\(^{41}\) Cf. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 14: “It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged.” Also, *The Second Sex*, 49: “…it is not the body-object described by scientists that exists concretely but the body lived by the subject. The female is woman, insofar as she feels herself as such.”
can legitimate alternative frameworks, we offer a language of self-recognition that does not rely on the morphology of the body as the pinnacle of legitimation.

4.5 Summing Up and Carrying Forward

At this point, I have responded to each of the major challenges for formulating a queer self. Yet, my pragmatic method urges one caveat: the viability of my thesis has yet to be confirmed in practice. As Addams writes in her closing chapter of *Democracy and Social Ethics*, “Ethics as well as political opinions may be discussed and disseminated among the sophisticated by lectures and printed pages, but to the common people they can only come through example...”42 The true test of my argument will be in whether this framework queer self benefits diverse contexts, among individuals of discrete circumstances and levels of education.

However, we do already see emerging a proliferation of images that bring LGBTIA+ issues more centrally into public conversation. In television, shows such as Roseanne and Will & Grace feature gay and lesbian characters; The L Word, The Wire, RuPaul’s Drag Race, and Orange is the New Black deal with the complicated intersections of race, class, and sexuality; and Billions introduced us to the first non-binary character in a prominent role.

Consider, as well, Caitlyn Jenner’s success in promoting visibility for trans issues. Because of the very public nature of her transition, Jenner was awarded the Arthur Ashe Courage Award in 2015. However, Jenner’s drew so much attention because of certain specifics of her situation. Prior to transitioning, Jenner was a paragon of hegemonic masculinity: a white, male, affluent athlete. Each trait alone affords certain opportunities; their combination guarantees visible authority. In widely discussing and normalizing her transition, we also publicly reified social habits that inhibit other trans individuals from being accepted and/or being able to

transition: money buys power and offsets any aberrancy; white queerness is the type that gains visibility and greater recognition.

Queer selves mean that situations like this are going to be resiliently problematic within the social sphere. These fractures contest the naturalness of how we do things and make possible their reorientation. Though Jenner’s case concealed many challenges trans individuals face in transitioning, it nonetheless presents a step in ‘normalizing’ queerness. Normalizing one case of queerness builds a case for normalizing others. It provides a foothold for resonating with diverse peoples, building mutual sympathies that were not there before.
CHAPTER 5. TRANSACTIONS OF QUEER THEORY AND PRAGMATISM

"Intelligence is not something possessed once and for all. It is in constant process of forming, and its retention requires constant alertness in observing consequences, an open-minded will to learn and courage in re-adjustment." ¹

We have reached our end-in-view: we re-conceptualized the self, starting with LGBTIA+ experiences, and tested its efficacy in ameliorating challenges. This end is not a finality, but rather a culmination of the current arc of inquiry. Achieving ends reorients experience and poses further endeavors. They present a culmination of the project, but also open new possibilities that project us forward. Thus, the purpose of this concluding chapter is to draw together the various conceptual threads within these pages and to look toward what potential projects are on the horizon, where the current inquiry leaves us. In what follows, I discuss shared aims in the emergent relationship between pragmatism and queer theory and ways in which each complements and benefits the other’s project(s). I will then speculate on what other projects may come out of the pairing of pragmatism and queer theory.

5.1 Shared Aims

Significant work has been done to illustrate how the aims and projects of pragmatism and feminism resemble one another. I draw on these resources to forge a similar bridge between pragmatism and queer theory.² Most focally, my project reveals that the two coincide insofar as they both affirm: (1.) interdependence of the individual and the social; (2.) a plurality of

¹ Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 55-56.
² It is not my aim to differentiate queer theory from feminist inquiry, though the two can diverge, depending on how their practitioners define their projects. Sorting out the differences is another project; doing so is not necessary for my purposes here, which are to identify shared aims between pragmatism and queer theory.
differently-situated perspectives; (3.) a rejection of substantive selfhood/identity; and (4.) disrupting dualisms.

(1.) First, individuals and society are interdependent and mutually formative. What we might call the personal sphere is not distinct from the social sphere; social norms are not independent of individual instantiation and/or critique. Consider the following representative passages from Butler and Dewey. In the introduction to *Undoing Gender*, Butler emphasizes that we are always “Acting in Concert”:

> Indeed, individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency. Conversely (and as a consequence), it turns out that changing the institutions by which humanly viable choice is established and maintained is a prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination. In this sense, individual agency is bound up with social critique and social transformation.\(^3\)

And from Dewey:

> [Social arrangements, laws, institutions] are means of creating individuals… Individuality in a social and moral sense is something to be wrought out. It means initiative, inventiveness, varied resourcefulness, assumption of responsibility in choice of belief and conduct…. [W]hen self-hood is perceived to be an active process it is also seen that social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities. Institutions are viewed in their educative effect:–with reference to the types of individuals they foster. The interest in individual moral improvement and the social interest in objective reform of economic and political conditions are identified.\(^4\)

Pairing these passages, we see a reliance on social norms, relations, and institutions in the constitution of individuals/subjects/selves. A complement of this reliance is that individuals have transformative power in how they engage with these social complexes. We gain a sense of individuality through social transaction; this fosters a unique standpoint for social critique and improvement.

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\(^3\) Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 7.

Fostering more inclusive, equitable social practices demands rethinking how we conceive of the self and its relation(s) to society. As Addams demonstrates, both in her writing and in her work with the Hull House settlement, our conception of self is not separate from our social ethic. This is the thrust of Black feminist writers’ critiques of liberal individualism. hooks quotes Zillah Eisenstein:

Until a conscious differentiation is made between a theory of individuality that recognizes the importance of the individual within the social collectivity and the ideology of individualism that assumes a competitive view of the individual, there will not be a full accounting of what a feminist theory of liberation must look like in our Western society.\(^\text{5}\)

Such critiques demonstrate the need to re-conceptualize selfhood. As Dewey writes in “The Ethics of Democracy,” “the non-social individual is an abstraction arrived at by imagining what man would be if all his human qualities were taken away.”\(^\text{6}\) We first exist together and then form an idea of our individuality.

(2.) Pragmatism and queer theory also both acknowledge the significance of irreducibly plural, differently-situated perspectives. Each of us is situated in relation to myriad social arrangements; this concrete situation affects how we experience, understand, and transact with the world. Explaining James’ account of rationality, Seigfried writes:

Each person is a unique and irreplaceable angle of vision… Concomitantly, no one’s angle of vision can encompass the whole without distortion and loss. Our lives are fragmented; we are part of many partial stories, and the pain of isolation can be relieved by cooperative ventures.\(^\text{7}\)

Knowledge claims are not independent from their development within concrete situations and in response to specific problems/questions that occasion inquiry. As previously discussed, Addams’

\(^{5}\) hooks quoting Zillah Eisenstein’s *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* in Feminist Theory, 9.
conviction in the incommensurability of human perspectives motivated her to pursue encounters with individuals whose backgrounds and social status diverged from her own. Such encounters reveal our prejudicial ways of thinking that result from our peculiarly situated upbringing. Seigfried explains: “Limitations inherent in the perspectival and interpretational manner of human understanding require ever wider and more critical encounters and transactions to overcome such limitations, however incrementally.”

Furthermore, both pragmatism and queer theory conceive of the transaction of these multiple perspectives in praxes, inquiry, and critique as processes of growth. hooks writes: “We resist hegemonic dominance of feminist thought by insisting that it is a theory in the making, that we must necessarily criticize, question, re-examine, and explore new possibilities.” Critiques in Chicana feminism emphasize the need for and strength in speaking their own language. In “Speaking in Tongues,” Azaldúa encourages fellow writers that their lived experiences equip them with worthwhile contributions to collective conceptions of the world:

The danger in writing is not fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in, with our inner life… What matters to us is the relationships that are important to us whether with our self or with others… The danger is in being too universal and humanitarian and invoking the eternal to the sacrifice of the particular and the feminine and the specific historical moment.

As Seigfried explains Addams’ perspectivism: “Only by bringing these missing perspectives into a community’s search for understanding and resolution of shared problems can intelligence be effectively employed.”

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9 hooks, Feminist Theory, 10-11.
10 Cf. the discussion of Lugones and Spelman’s “Have We Got a Theory For You!” in Chapter One, “Queer Concerns.”
Third, pragmatism and queer theory both reject a substantive notion of self. Rather, the self emerges and evolves in social transaction. Several authors capitalize on such affinities between Dewey’s social self and Butler’s performative self. For the pragmatists, the individual is always enmeshed in various social processes that situate, comprise, and sustain individual growth. For Butler, there is no self that exists prior to the discursive process of repeatedly stylizing oneself with cultural meanings. Whereas Butler accounts for the self as a performative negotiation of social scripts and compulsions, the pragmatists describe the self as a dynamic process/product. Both recognize dynamism — resilience, but also adaptability — in meanings that necessarily connect to ways in which we exist in the world. This commonality allows us to accommodate and proliferate queerness with the social self and its accompanying methodologies. It also demonstrates that ridding ourselves of a substantive notion of self does not altogether rid us of being able to talk about the self in a meaningful, politically recognizable sense.

Fourth, John Stuhr identifies pragmatisms’ rejection of dualisms as part of its critique of modern philosophy:

…these notions refer to distinctions made in thought rather than to different kinds of being or levels of existence. That is, these terms have a functional rather than an ontological status: they stand for useful distinctions made within reflection, and not for different kinds of being, discrete and separate prior to reflection.

It has been crucial to my project to develop this idea that the distinction between things is not set, but more fluid than described. Continuities that have been significant to the current project include body-mind, sex/gender, self and society, personal and social, male and female, masculine and feminine, normative and queer. These distinctions help describe and interpret phenomena,

but do not represent metaphysical distinctions in experience. Similarly, queer theory critiques attempts to naturalize and regulate boundaries that are permeable, crossable, undoable. In my last chapter, I offered Anzaldúa’s deft critique: “They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. You say my name is ambivalence?... Not so. Only your labels split me.” Queer theory need not be seen in opposition to identifications, insofar as we recognize that these boundaries are always under negotiation. Queer theorists de-naturalize such boundaries and, further, challenge their operability in opening possibilities for human existence. In this way, pragmatism and queer theory both contest fixing designations, since they are meant to express and help make sense of human experience, which is always adaptive and on-the-move.

5.2 Complements

Perhaps the current project focuses more on what pragmatism can do for queer theory than the reverse. My central thesis has been that pragmatism’s social self recognizes and legitimates queer (LGBTIA+) selves and the queerness of selves in general. This framework rests on several methodological points that reinforce pragmatisms’ efficacy for queer theory. For example, pragmatisms’ pluralism and fallibilism especially enable it to accommodate queer issues. We can speak of conflicting senses of queerness in varying contexts and allow that significations change in transaction(s). I need not tarry on this point here, since the foregoing project is an extended example of what pragmatism can do for queer theory.

Coming at this transaction from the other side, there are significant benefits that queer theory can offer pragmatism as well. As I argued in my third chapter, when we apply the social self to queer contexts, we thereby queer the social self. One of the benefits that follows from recognizing mutual queerness — even though what makes us personally queer, as selves, is

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incommensurable — is that we begin to foster more diverse mutual interests. As Iris Marion Young writes in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*:

> The dissolution of cultural imperialism thus requires a cultural revolution which also entails a revolution in subjectivity. Rather than seeking a wholeness of the self, we who are the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we are heterogeneous and multiple in our affiliations and desires.\(^{16}\)

I advocate that we acknowledge our personal queerness(es); this is another way of saying that we should “affirm the otherness within ourselves.”

Another focal benefit that queer theory offers is its habitual interrogation of guiding presumptions in the theoretical framework(s) that systemically marginalize certain groups along lines of sex, gender, and desire. Writing on the benefits of feminism for pragmatism, Seigfried explains:

> In making explicit its own interpretive space, feminism can help to identify the hidden assumptions of pragmatist analyses and to demonstrate the crucial difference between merely acknowledging other perspectives and coming to terms with the consequences of such recognition.\(^{17}\)

The correlative claim of queer theory is, then, not only that it makes explicit its interpretive space, but also that it *challenges* the framework(s) of that interpretive space. Queer theory offers the opportunity to rethink our commitments and what presumptions are in play when we identify problems for problem-solving. It also offers alternative formulations of problems and/or the social institutions that underlie such problems. As Addams reminds us, transacting with diversely situated peoples with varying perspectives benefits us, significantly in part by disclosing personal prejudices that we may not otherwise bring under critical reflection.

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\(^{16}\) Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 124. Young identifies *cultural imperialism* as the practice of marginalizing and stereotyping certain groups experiences, language, and culture in relation to a dominant ideology or hegemonic ideal. Ibid., 58-59.

\(^{17}\) Seigfried, *Pragmatism and Feminism*, 10.
Queer theory can also offer pragmatism greater elucidation of the complex interwoven factors that frame individuals’ concrete situations, specifically how sex, gender, and sexuality constitute and impact our transactions with the world. Again, Seigfried writes: “Pragmatism needs feminism to carry out its own stated program, since feminists are at the forefront of philosophers addressing the social and political issues that affect women.”18 We can easily make an analogous claim: pragmatism needs queer theory to carry out its own stated program, since queer theorists are at the forefront of philosophers addressing the social and political issues that affect LGBTIA+ individuals. Queer theory emphasizes marginalized constructions of personhood and identifies places/bodies in which the coherence of gender and personhood peel away from one another. These are the selves in which mechanisms of gender become most visible, because they are problematized.

Pragmatism begins inquiry with interrogating the concrete context that frames a problem. Queer theory complements this by putting into question framing presumptions in inquiry. Queer theory questions what we normatively take to be gender and self. Pragmatism offers a methodology for this questioning and inquiry.

5.3 Inquiries to Carry Us Forward

The result(s) of inquiry includes a re-settling of equilibrium, but also a reorientation in thought/experience. So far in this chapter, we have discussed the ways in which combining pragmatism and queer theory produce shifts in thought that allow us to re-conceptualize certain themes and projects in both fields. Let us consider how this acts as a springboard for further projects of inquiry. Though not exhaustive, I offer three such projects, each which follow from the theory developed in the current project.

18 Seigfried, Pragmatism and Feminism, 37.
5.3.1 Proposals for Social Transformation

One of the significant continuing projects for the mingling of pragmatism and queer theory will be in proposing programs for social transformation. In general, we need ways of incorporating critical thinking more in our society, co-mingled with a principle of charity, trying to find the strongest articulation and deepest understanding of another’s point of view. Specifically, we need programs that encourage greater variation in both recognition and expression.

I conceive of my project here as one theoretical step toward social transformation. As I argued in my last chapter, part of my aim is to offer an alternative framework for thinking about the self that could reshape our social habits surrounding queerness. This theoretical project requires verification in practice. I begin offering such strategies that would better accommodate a range of queerness: (i.) diversify public representations and models of persons and (ii.) reform educational practices with the aim toward life-long learning and critical engagement. Yet, I do not presume to have offered detailed or fleshed-out programs for concrete application. Moving forward, I see this needing to be an interdisciplinary venture to determine what works, what is effective in changing attitudes and habits surrounding LGBTIA+ discourses. I do not have the background in childhood development or ethnographical data to substantiate any specific suggestions. I rely on personal trial and error and build localized theory on that front. For a more prescriptive account, we would need authorities from various fields to determine what concretely works to effect uptake in the social programs for desired changes.

5.3.2 Reconciling Essentialism and/vs. Constructivism

A primary debate between Essentialism and Constructivism is over the question of whether there is something biologically determined about sex/gender that exists prior to and/or
independent of sociocultural discourse (Essentialism) or whether both sex and gender are socially defined in relation to the contingent situation out of which they arise (Constructivism).

In “The End of Sexual Difference?,” Butler identifies this as an irresolvable question, i.e. how to draw the boundaries between sex, gender, and sexuality:

…the debates concerning the theoretical priority of sexual difference to gender, of gender to sexuality, of sexuality to gender, are all crosscut by another kind of problem, a problem that sexual differences poses, namely, the permanent difficulty of determining where the biological, the psychic, the discursive, the social begin and end.19

Though I do not presume to answer this permanent difficulty, I argue that pragmatism offers a non-dichotomized alternative to essentialist and constructivist models.

The nature of any situation contains both ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ elements. What this means for one’s uniquely gendered situation is that it includes both what is bodily ‘given’ and that which is culturally molded. In my third chapter, I talk in terms of gender habits and how they develop and adjust in relation to one’s environment. In chapter four, I once again emphasize that this means that identifications are dynamic and what the body signifies, or the gender cues that it gives off are dynamic, changing in how we take them up as meaningful.

Already in feminist philosophers’ dialogues we find proposals like this pragmatic, social/material transactional model. Beauvoir describes the body as both factual and transcendent. The body exists as what both constrains and guides our situation, itself developing and being molded in how we project ourselves into our world. How we take up the body renders it meaningful. Passages in The Second Sex indicate that Beauvoir reads sexuality, as well, as some combination of what she identifies as subjective choice and ‘ontological’ constants. In her critique of psychoanalysis, Beauvoir writes:

Sexuality must not be taken as an irreducible given; the existent possesses a more primary “quest for being”; sexuality is only one of these aspects…. But the idea of

19 Butler, “The End of Sexual Difference?” in Undoing Gender, 185.
freedom is not incompatible with the existence of certain constants… Existence is one, across and through the separation of existents, manifesting itself in analogous organisms; so there will be constants in the relationship between the ontological and the sexual… there will also be a constant relation of sexuality to social forms; analogous individuals, placed in analogous conditions, will grasp analogous significations in the given…

Beauvoir rejects psychoanalysis’ reductive reading of existence singularly through the lens of sexuality. However, this includes the further point that sexuality, like any other project of life, intermingles human choice/freedom/valuation and the concrete situation out of which the possibilities for this choice arises. This depiction of sexuality fits Dewey’s account of experience as a transaction of organism and environment in which the former has just as much say as the latter. It is neither arbitrarily chosen nor predetermined, neither constructed ex nihilo nor essentially in rerum natura.

Marilyn Frye, as well, verges on a pragmatic reading of sexual differentiation in The Politics of Reality. Frye explains how habituation becomes biological:

If one habitually twists a lock of one’s hair whenever one is reading and has tried to break this habit, one knows how ‘bodily’ it is; but that does not convince one it is genetically determined…. Socialization molds our bodies; enculturation forms our skeletons, our musculature, our central nervous system. By the time we are gendered adults, masculinity and femininity are “biological.” They are structural and material features of how our bodies are… But now “biological” does not mean “genetically determined” or “inevitable.” It just means “of the animal.”

Frye offers a reciprocal, mutually-formative relationship between biology and culture, or what is commonly reduced to the sex/biological, gender/cultural distinction. There is great social compulsion to abide by one gender story; this is the norm, a narrative which normativizes. It compels us to stick to some standard deviation of expression and thus re-instantiates it as a standard deviation. By adulthood, habits of gender become part of our biology, or rather, how our bodies are constituted.

20 Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 55-56.
A pragmatic, transactional account of gender avoids a strictly constructivist reading insofar as we acknowledge that there exist material conditions which constrain and guide our development of gender habits. There are real cultural meanings that necessarily constrain what social meanings are available for articulating ourselves. But recall that that which is real is the material for change; a material that is already imbued with shifting social, culturally-situated meanings that are subject to revision in how we take them up and embody them. Thus, it also avoids a strictly essentialist reading insofar as we acknowledge that the starting components which we are thrown into, with which we transact to simultaneously understand and formulate ourselves, are subject to change. As Dewey explains, the real and the ideal are dialectically related to one another. In *A Common Faith*, Dewey writes:

…the ideal itself has its roots in natural conditions; it emerges when the imagination idealizes existence by laying hold of the possibilities offered to thought and action… Aims, ideals, do not exist simply in ‘mind’; they exist in character, in personality and action.  

Just as experience and reason are reciprocally interrelated, so are the real conditions of existence and the purposes, values, and ideals that guide our transcendence of our current conditions. “Ideals change as they are applied in existent conditions.”

Describing how norms regulate gender, Butler explains that gender is not exclusively the ideals that name/articulate it; neither is it exclusively the coterie of performances that instantiate these norms. It is both; and these two elements transact the material and the social, the ‘essential’ and the ‘constructed.’ Gender is the personal/social *transaction* of these elements rather than explained by either extreme.

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24 Butler, “Regulating Gender,” in *Undoing Gender*, 42.
5.3.3 Building a Queer Epistemology

Within this dissertation, I theorize a notion of the self by first taking seriously queerness and issues that often define queer individuals’ lives. This similarly provides a starting point for questions of knowledge claims within queer contexts and/or inquiring whether centralizing queer concerns entails a specific epistemological method.

Much has been written to define, systematize, and defend feminist epistemologies. Generally, approaches fall into one of three methodologies: (1) feminist empiricism, (2) standpoint epistemology, or (3) postmodern or post-structuralist epistemology. Comparatively little has been offered to define queer epistemologies, or ways of knowing that might develop out of the experiences of marginal sexes, genders, and sexualities. Sarah Hoagland’s unpublished paper entitled “Lesbian Epistemology” appears to denote simply an epistemology developed from a lesbian standpoint. Simon Watney discusses epistemic implications of ‘outing’ and ‘coming out’ practices in his piece entitled “Queer Epistemology,” but does not specify what the term itself designates. Similarly, David Eng employs the term as a heading in “What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” yet does little to define queer epistemology beyond gesturing to its association with queer issues.

In thinking about what it might mean to frame a queer epistemology, I find Louise Antony’s dual interpretation of the question of feminist epistemology helpful. Antony notes that we can interpret “Do we need a feminist epistemology?” in two ways:

[1] Are there specific questions or problems that arise as a result of feminist analysis, awareness, or experience that any adequate epistemology must accommodate?

and/or

25 Frye, “To Be and Be Seen,” in The Politics of Reality, 152.
Do we need, in order to accommodate these questions, insights, and projects, a specifically feminist alternative to currently available epistemological frameworks? We can adapt this schema for queer epistemic concerns. Following my preceding arguments, it should come as no surprise that we must affirm the claim in question in [1]. Yes, any adequate epistemology must accommodate the full range of knowers’ embodiments. In her article, Antony champions Quine’s naturalist epistemology as a candidate and denies the need for a specifically feminist epistemology. Thus, her response to [2] is no. Yet, note that she appeals to a pragmatic epistemology to handle feminist concerns.

I argue that a pragmatic methodology can accommodate queer concerns as well. Yet, because of the problematizing nature of queerness – or the very queerness of queerness – incorporating queer concerns queers a naturalistic epistemological framework. That is, my answer to [2] is a resolute yes and no. Insofar as pragmatism is a currently available framework that can handle queer epistemic concerns, we need not engineer an alternative methodology. Nonetheless, applying this methodology within queer contexts – combining pragmatism and queer theory – prompts a mutual adjustment of the two. For example, applying the social self to queer lives queered the social self, revealing that, in a sense, all selves are queer. This is a strength of pragmatism, that it can adapt. The question is then whether this is pragmatism per usual, insofar as pragmatism is a methodology and queerness its content, or if this is a new strain of pragmatism. That is, does this create a specifically queer epistemology? Yes, we appeal to an available epistemological method (pragmatism), but its application to queer concerns does not produce results ‘per usual.’ Pragmatism argues for the pluralism of truth and the functionality of knowledge. As a method, it acknowledges the specificity of its results to the nature of the

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situation out of which inquiry develops. Its adaption and revision are accepted as part of its method. Insofar as means and ends, content and methodology, are inseparable for pragmatists, we *do* get a specifically queer epistemology. So, no, we do not need a *new* epistemology; pragmatism is well-equipped to handle queer concerns. But yes, the results will be specifically queer ways of knowing.

I envision that the ensuing project starts by developing criteria to determine what makes an epistemological framework sufficient for handling queer issues. For this, I look to three of the primary progenitors of queer theory, Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, and Eve Sedgwick, to characterize queerness and the ways in which it problematizes knowledge claims and/or yields its own ways of knowing. The difficulty with characterizing a queer epistemology is that we must balance the demands of the necessarily elusive and incalculable queer with the necessarily normative and in some sense standardized constraints of epistemology. This is not unlike the difficulty we encountered in defining the self such that it both eludes a fixed definition of queerness and maintains political efficacy.

Equipped with criteria for evaluating candidates for a queer epistemology, I propose appraising the three camps of feminist epistemologies for their ability to accommodate queerness. Feminist empiricism, standpoint theories, and postmodern epistemologies already offer much consideration of the relationship between gender and ways of knowing. Since queer theory is often identified as post-modern critique, we might easily argue that this suggests postmodern epistemologies are clearly the corresponding methodology. However, the sticking point for postmodernism is a critique that we encountered in theorizing queer selfhood: its ability to represent subjects as collectively identified by their queerness is dubious. I have already
argued for how pragmatism responds to this problem in queer theory with an alternative conception of selfhood.

The further task will be in judging whether pragmatism also outdoes feminist empiricism and standpoint theories in handling queer concerns. An empiricist model is unlikely to tolerate multiform notions of the queer; queerness is disruptive and may include ambiguity that cannot be empirically determined. Adopting a standpoint epistemology instead, we might identify patterns of differential treatment toward individuals variously identified as queer and thus define a queer standpoint. For example, the experience of ‘coming out’ is, in one sense or another, shared by many queer individuals. Nonetheless, the many modes of queerness may not share a common standpoint; the patterns of differential treatment are not analogous among all LGBTIA+ individuals, much less queer selves in the broader sense.

Pragmatism is well equipped for queer epistemology because it recognizes individuals’ divergent modes of reasoning, based on discrete backgrounds of experience, which yield different types of knowledge. As I noted in my third chapter, one of the benefits of the queer self is that it takes LGBTIA+ lives as models of knowledge rather than as exceptions or aberrations. Adopting queer lives and experiences as a starting point for theorizing yields knowledge fit for and operative in those queer situations from which it arises. Prioritizing queer concerns chooses certain objectives toward which we act; it identifies and articulates different questions for inquiry. In short, having queer experiences in our backgrounds and drawing from them suggests unique possibilities for acting toward new ends.

Each of these worthy projects builds from the coalition between pragmatism and queer theory developed throughout the preceding pages. Though I began with the question of how to
re-conceptualize the self, this inquiry yields broader implications for how pragmatism and queer theory may fruitfully speak with one another.

Let us re-conceptualize the self along pragmatic, social lines. Let us queer the notion and acknowledge its very queerness. I offer this theoretical framework as one that reveals resonances that we all have with LGBTIA+ lives in attempting to gather our disparate scraps of selfhood into a coherent narrative that we can cognize to ourselves and render to others. In a sense, this framework normalizes queerness. It emphasizes that the process of developing any (gendered) self is at one with how LGBTIA+ individuals come to embody and find themselves in this social/material world that we co-constitute. I built my theoretical framework from the praxes of LGBTIA+ experiences; may it be accountable to them and faithfully represent them.
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