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## Queering Methodologies: Challenging Scientific Constraint in the Appreciation of Queer and Trans Subjects

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### Abstract

Qualitative studies require a queer perspective to challenge stagnant forms of scientific discourse. This paper argues for a deconstruction of hegemonic qualitative practices in order to appreciate and listen to queer and trans subjects when employing qualitative research and methodologies. I focus on qualitative methods from an audiovisual perspective to suggest that there is scientific constraint in the way researchers still approach qualitative methodologies. I propose some foundations for thinking about queer qualitative methods that employs queer theory in relation to a self - reflexive creative perspective towards ethics, research and representation. Moreover, I critically analyze the HBO trans documentary, *Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She* (Antony Thomas 2005), in order to move beyond complacent documentaries that employ interviews as a way of categorizing and containing gender diversity. I work towards future methodological promises for the exploration of queer and trans subjects. Further, this paper challenges the problems of imposing binary - based categories that not only obscure thorough understandings of gender but also perpetuate social injustice.

### Keywords

qualitative research

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## **Queering Methodologies: Challenging Scientific Constraint in the Appreciation of Queer and Trans Subjects**

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*Qualitative studies require a queer perspective to challenge stagnant forms of scientific discourse. This paper argues for a deconstruction of hegemonic qualitative practices in order to appreciate and listen to queer and trans subjects when employing qualitative research and methodologies. I focus on qualitative methods from an audiovisual perspective to suggest that there is scientific constraint in the way researchers still approach qualitative methodologies. I propose some foundations for thinking about queer qualitative methods that employs queer theory in relation to a self-reflexive creative perspective towards ethics, research and representation. Moreover, I critically analyze the HBO trans documentary, *Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She* (Antony Thomas 2005), in order to move beyond complacent documentaries that employ interviews as a way of categorizing and containing gender diversity. I work towards future methodological promises for the exploration of queer and trans subjects. Further, this paper challenges the problems of imposing binary-based categories that not only obscure thorough understandings of gender but also perpetuate social injustice. Keywords: Gender Studies, Trans Studies, Qualitative Methods, Film Studies, Queer Theory, Postmodernism, Self-Reflexivity, Autoethnography*

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“The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can – free thought – from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.”

Michel Foucault

“Knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting.”

Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory*

“Laughter in the face of serious categories is indispensable to feminism.”

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*

“Modernism is just, like, you know...so *over, dude.*”

Jacques Derrida

Qualitative methodologies and inquiries are shackled by scientific discourse. The spectre of science that permeates qualitative-based research seeks to maintain a set of rules that operates under mechanistic invisibility and often wounds research subjects by treating them like sources of data/texts to dissect and study. This is not to say that all qualitative methodologies operate as a monolith, but that the foundations of qualitative methods, particularly the French positivist tradition of Kant and Durkheim, have been constructed with empirical scientism. There are qualitative studies that reject and/or challenge typical social/scientific foundational-based research and some of these studies will be discussed. I think that these methodologies, however, hold inquiry-based promise for arts and humanities research that questions human experience and social and cultural processes from perspectives

that render scientific rationality problematic and open to critical review. Further, I propose a queer theoretical (feminist) implosion of the scientific foundation of qualitative methodologies to deconstruct and reconstruct an area of inquiry that is foregrounded in an appreciation of diversity vis-à-vis a rejection of codes, categories and thematic preoccupations. The objective of some social scientific-based qualitative methodologies is to prove a hypothesis by exposing “data” from human subjects. The application of scientific discourse to an understanding of human behaviour and experience in relation to cultural and social processes and specificities renders research participants as “test” subjects and entrenches them in what I call discourses of scientific constraint. Instead of enabling research participants to be the research and results, qualitative methodologies are often employed to use research participants as fact-based evidence for their research questions. Therefore, research subjects’ experiences and testimonies act as -- often, homogeneous -- “truth” derived from observation and individual experiences. However, the individual experiences act as a universal construction of truth that ignores cultural and historical specificities. An interdisciplinary approach to deconstructing qualitative methodology born from scientific discourse will enable a queer (feminist) poststructuralist perspective on research design/preparation, narrative collection, analysis, representation and self-reflexivity that emphasizes polyvocality and alterity in the research results instead of universality and monolithic-based inquiries. I am using “narrative collection” instead of “data collection” here to mean any and all qualitative responses in interviewing, focus groups and surveys that resemble people telling their own stories as most qualitative work asks its participants to share stories and not “data.”

I will queer qualitative methods to recognize and appreciate -- listen to -- diversity in what I call the pre-production, production and post-production of qualitative research. I use the three stages of film production to describe processes of qualitative inquiry because my specific area of questioning is through the lens of a camera. Metaphorically, however, I believe all qualitative work requires lenses and a fascination with seeing and hearing that mimics audiovisual approaches. Thus, the three stages organize the stages of qualitative work. A queer qualitative methodology will remain sensitive to queerness in all instances instead of trying to categorize and contain it. Queer subjects are those that are consistently marginalized from normative and socially accepted identity categories, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, genderqueer, intersex, asexual, two-spirited among others, which I will further describe in my section on queer theory. I will subvert and queer existing qualitative frameworks to think beyond traditional approaches to representation. For example, in my qualitative work in documentary filmic form, I intend to approach the representation of my participants’ subjectivities in a fluid sense by acknowledging the impermanence of framing in terms of “seeing” participants through various lenses. Each participant’s representation will recognize their unique perspective -- a unique lens -- that “sees” and understands each and every interview -- whether they are speaking or just existing in front of the camera -- from very different points of view by appreciating the impermanence and instability of framing, seeing and listening to research participants. The “framing” of the participants is important in the sense that they are represented with respect and dignity in relation to their queerness. A queer qualitative methodological perspective will always already challenge the constraint in framing participants’ involvement in qualitative research whether this framing is through a camera lens and/or a writer’s pen.

My first priority is to theoretically deconstruct and reconstruct qualitative methodology by queering scientific foundations. I will “play” with qualitative methodologies by providing examples of scientific-based inquiries that silence queer voices in contrast to what I believe are humanities-based feminist perspectives that actively engage and enable queerness. After the remnants of science are stripped free of discourses and ideologies of

constraint, I will describe my self-reflexive creative perspective towards ethics, research and representation that is molded from queer theory. I will then apply this critical theoretical framework of queer qualitative methodology to analyze *Middle Sexes: Redefining He and She* (Thomas, 2005). This documentary film is one of a few documentaries that exist in representing multiple queer gendered subjects; however, the film's representation of non-normative gendered subjects using interviews is problematic in various ways that recall scientifically founded methodologies. The majority of documentary films that employ interviews such as *Becoming Chaz* (Bailey & Barbato, 2011), *Girl Inside* (Gallus, 2007), *100% Woman* (Duthie, 2004) and *Becoming Ayden* (CBC, 2004), focus on individual people who live with a transgendered and/or transsexual identity. My theoretical and methodological framework will pinpoint these problems and work to present queer prevention/intervention methods to avoid them in future qualitative documentary work. Finally, here are some of the questions that will be raised later in this paper that all researchers employing qualitative inquiry should consider, especially from an audiovisual medium. How will I involve myself within the diegetic space (in the filmic world of my documentary)? How will my voyeuristic perspectives via the camera lens in non-participant observation respect ethical boundaries? How will I control the space of representation? Will my interviews respect inclusivity? How will I challenge exclusionary practices in filmic representation? Ultimately, does a queer qualitative methodology challenge the constraint embedded in ways of seeing/looking in relation to representational strategies?

### **Consequences of Static Science-based Foundations of Qualitative Methodology**

My quest is to challenge static and regressive scientific layers of constraint around and apropos qualitative methods. A generalization of qualitative methodology is problematic; therefore, my focus is on exclusionary and silencing practices in the tools, process and representation strategies employed in qualitative work. In other words, "mid-century positivist conceptions of scientific method and knowledge stressed objectivity, generality, replication of research and falsification of competing hypotheses and theories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). And, this type of study reduces the possible qualities of human experience in order to satisfy quantifiable variables (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Stanley R. Barrett (1996) states that "by empiricism, it is meant that one's work has to be grounded in data, in facts, in the "real" or concrete world, by positivism, it is meant that the social world is orderly and patterned, and that, the fact-value distinction must exist (that is, one's personal values or beliefs must not influence that outcome of one's research efforts)" (p. 31). Qualitative work that focused on interpreting and analyzing the meanings of "research participants" initiated disagreements about qualitative perspectives as being worthy for scientific studies (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Indeed, many scholars doing qualitative work are distracted by scientific critiques of their work for being self-reflexive and/or too interpretive instead of objective, and this distraction allows science to maintain control over qualitative inquiry either through language, objection to interpretation and analysis. Scientific discourse questions qualitative inquiries that stray too far from objectivity and generality that produces a dialectical tension between scientific methods and more humanities-based methods that allow for multiple levels of interpretation instead of single conclusion that is the product of scientific rationality. Qualitative methods grounded in a queer feminist framework disavow positivist, empirical and truth-based inquiries. I think that it is time for qualitative studies to question and challenge extant language, particularly using "data," "codes," "categories," and "themes," to mean and constrain narratives and participants' responses. Qualitative methods, then, need to cut the cords, so to speak, from the scientific foundation that it was birthed from in the first place

similar to how qualitative grew out of quantitative – qualitative inquiries require a deconstruction and reconstruction to shatter methodologies’ scientific shackles.

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss provided qualitative methods with grounded theory that worked to challenge forms of methodological consensus (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Interestingly, scholars are now working to expand this “consensus,” particularly Adele Clarke who I will discuss later. However, Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory, which seems like the obvious challenge to scientific discourse, perpetuates a linguistic obsession with “technical operations,” including “data,” “codes,” “categories,” “themes,” and a constant comparative method (Barrett, 1996, p. 214; Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Charmaz (2006) discusses further how grounded theory by 1990 became known its rigor and usefulness and also for its positivistic assumption (p. 9). The promise, though, exists in the modifiability of this “data” in order for the narratives of research participants, regardless of the length of the responses, to exist as kinetic research informants that work with the researcher instead of simply acting as objective evidence to prove a hypothesis. Jeffrey P. Aguinaldo, in his 2004 paper “Rethinking Validity in Qualitative Research from a Social Constructionist Perspective” mimics my movement away from seeing “data” as narratives. He describes his research findings as “narratives” because of they involve “representational politics that advance a particular version or interpretation of the social world” (p. 130). There should be a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant in order for the hierarchical power-based relationship disappears (Barrett, 1996, p. 29). To deconstruct qualitative methodologies founded in scientific rigor and discourse, one must consider that the logic of research and epistemological assumptions (Barrett, 1996, p. 42) are fluid and never prescriptions for research conduct and design. In this sense, epistemologies are instable and hardly universal – they are always unique to the specific framework of each study. The logic of research initiates from the notion that there is no universal, logical standpoint for conducting qualitative work. Instead, all inquiries that employ interviews, focus groups and open-ended survey questions are qualitative and there is no simple and rational logical perspective on conducting this research. The essence of qualitative inquiry is that there is no essence and/or logical prescription because each research paradigm and project goals are unique. Consequently, the power science has over qualitative methods will be challenged vis-à-vis a deconstruction of “logical” stages through “data-sets,” and “codes.” Charmaz (2006) views the design of qualitative inquiry as a set of “principles and practices” instead of “prescriptions and packages” (p. 9). Charmaz’s perspective enables a movement away from science informing us of what we ought to do towards an acceptance of what we can practice.

For this section, it is important to provide an example of a qualitative-based study that adheres to scientific rigor and discourse by articulating the problematics of this approach (especially unintentional consequences in the representation of the research participants) and why contemporary qualitative methods need to consider a restructuring process. In “Negotiating the Binary: Identity and Social Justice for Bisexual and Transgender Individuals,” Catherine Cashore and Teresa G. Tuason (2009) conduct a study of nine transgender and bisexual individuals. In the abstract of their paper, they state the purpose of the study to be an examination “of experiences of identity and agency toward social justice of nine bisexual and transgender individuals through semistructured interviews” (p. 374). There are serious problems with Cashore and Tuason’s study because it creates an explicit divide between theory and methods that silences and marginalizes oppressed subjects in the area of representation. Aside from the obvious problem of studying two different identity categories/subjectivities in the same study (bisexual and transgender), the study is preoccupied with identity politics because the researchers ask questions of their participants from a position that seeks to cement queer subjectivities. In other words, by studying transgender and bisexual in the same study, the researchers foreclose potential specificities

because they attempt to study both gender and sexuality, which participates in a conflation of gender and sexuality. Further, I would question the reason behind publishing this article in the first place in the *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* because the researchers do not study gay and lesbian identities. Cashore and Tuason (2009) ask their participants to describe: “a). process of coming to understand their identities b). their comfort with the traditional terms used to describe their identities (e.g., Bisexual, transgender)” (p. 379). They frame the questions within a discourse of constraint by narrowing options instead of allowing the articulation of queer possibilities. The researchers make an opposition between normative queer identities and non-normative in the sense that they invite their participants to identify outside of the “traditional terms.” Furthermore, cross-analysis is used within the study to identify core categories and domains and the researchers’ approach to this representation of their findings contains a serious flaw. Cashore and Tuason interview nine individuals within their study, which is a small number of individuals in a qualitative study that seeks to understand complex experiences for the aims of social justice. They construct a hierarchy of “data” with their core categories. In particular, core categories that existed in all transcripts were considered general (8-9), those in half or more transcripts were considered typical (5-7), two to four were considered variant, and responses found in only one transcript were “considered rare and were dropped (1)” (pp. 380-381). Consequently, the study asks marginalized queer subjects to participate and share their life experiences and personal narratives, but it undermines “queer” and unique responses within the study by silencing and further marginalizing these participants who answered questions outside of the majority of responses.

I think this example is evidence of qualitative methodologies that are subsumed by scientific discourse of constraint in superficially acknowledging queer subjects and undermining their fluid and kinetic subjectivities. An alleviation of this problem requires qualitative inquiries and methods to surrender to the postmodern influenced queer impossibility of truth and generalizability in its paradigms. As Barrett (1996) eloquently puts it, “postmodernists, in contrast, emphasize the particular and the unique, valorize the ‘other’ (the subjects of research), and are comfortable with an image of social life that is inherently fragmented, disjointed and incomplete” (p. 153).

### **Queer Theory’s Challenge to Qualitative Methods and Inquiries**

Qualitative methods require a queering that will enable these types of studies to move beyond a documentation and analysis of injustice and inequality. Qualitative inquiries can act as praxis-oriented interventions in the area of social justice by surrendering all positivistic and empirical preoccupations. Queer qualitative methods accept that “the language of science is regarded as the language of oppression” (Barrett, 1996, p. 164). Queer theory provides qualitative methods with a “sophisticated irrationality” (Barrett, 1996, p. 175) that challenges the core foundation of scientism embedded in the language of qualitative inquiry. As Charmaz (2006) offers, “a method provides a tool to enhance seeing but does not provide automatic insight. We must see through the armament of methodological techniques and the reliance on mechanical procedures” (p. 15). I would agree with Charmaz’s statement, but change her notion of seeing through to an adoption of seeing with queer theory in every level of qualitative-based inquiry. Queer theory offers qualitative studies with “interesting tools, born in part from its assumption that sexual subjects are not simply there to be represented as good or bad, but always under construction” (Gamson, 2003, p. 388). Katherine Watson’s article, “Queer Theory,” critiques the theory’s historical link with practice in the sense that it elevates as high theory and fails to address sex, sexuality and gendered subjectivities on a practical level. However, I think that the fusion of queer theory with qualitative methods addresses this

problem and grounds the promise of queer theoretical aims in understanding life experiences and narratives.

Teresa de Lauretis first applied the term queer, in “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities” in 1991, to understand how women can have a voice and represent their experiences using both concepts and language constructed by the patriarchal social and political order (Turner, 2000, p. 5). I will maintain focus on sex and gender and avoid a typical approach to queer theory that attempts to study sex and gender with sexuality. Queer theory holds epistemological potential for gender studies as well as sexuality studies. Queer qualitative methods, would in Judith Butler’s words, produce “reverse discourses,” which are “competing discourses (collections of stories from experience that challenge the ‘truth’ of the discourse)” (Watson, 2005, p. 72). In addition, instead of finding tools to understand identity formation, queer qualitative methods will work to understand these “reverse discourses” in each and every subjectivity by challenging essentialist and universalist concerns. Sedgwick’s (1991) *Epistemology of the Closet* positions her criticism of the essentialist vs. constructionist binary and how this focuses attention on identity politics/formation. Watson states that “queer theory potentially allows for a deeper engagement with the complexities of subjectivity; how people resist, transform and enact their positions (regardless of the constraints of identity categories), and how relationships are traversed in complex ways” (Watson, 2005, p. 78). The intent of a majority of qualitative inquiries is to understand human experiences and all studies that explore queer subjects are concerned with what matters to our bodies and subjectivities. In William B. Turner’s (2000) *Genealogy of Queer Theory*, he strikes the connection between bodies and matter as a site of investigation in terms of being central to queer theory (p. 3). Turner (2000), then, asks, “Why do some bodies matter more than others?” (p. 3). Such a question illustrates the fascination with investigating how queer bodies and subjectivities matter both for the individual’s body, but also for the researcher who employs tools (methods) in seeking to understand, for whatever reason, why queer subjects exist as queer in the first place. I will subscribe to Turner’s (2000) notion that the field of queer theory remains open in relation to the difficulty of summarizing its definition (p. 3). Butler, Sedgwick, Foucault and Jacques Derrida are among the eminent poststructural scholars that inspired queer theory. Their inspiration originated from a determination to question sex, gender and sexuality from a perspective that constantly enables possibilities instead of closing down answers to questions that are informed by scientific rationality and empirical thought.

Queer theory enables questions in relation to sex, gender and sexuality that forego the eventuality of finding answers because it surrenders to the theory that each and every individual navigates the sex and gender binaries and categories in incommensurable ways. The only way, I believe, that we are able to understand queer subjectivities is by recognizing cultural and regional specificities of sex and gender vis-a-via qualitative inquiry that listens to, rather than silences, queer voices. Listening to queer subjects requires thinking beyond the scientific constraint that often disrupts qualitative inquiries that study queer subjects. The researcher must listen to and consider the “rare” questions as much as the common ones. Instead of ranking responses from common to rare, which seems to be quantitative, studies must seek new ways to listen to all voices equally in order to appreciate diverse voices. Turner (2000) suggests that “queerness indicates merely the failure to fit precisely within a category, and surely all persons at some time or other find themselves discomfited by the bounds of the categories that ostensibly contain their identities” (p. 8). Therefore, in Turner’s (2000) words, “could it be that everyone is queer?” (p. 8). Qualitative inquiry and the tools it adopts will begin to understand and be sensitive to queer subjects/participants when it accepts a “language of difference” which is focused on the multilayered understanding of difference rather than a concern for stable identity (Turner, 2000, p. 23). Turner’s (2000) work on queer theory bluntly suggests that “Foucault did not know what he was doing” (p. 23). Queer



qualitative perspectives do not know until the participant enables the knowing and epistemological understanding; therefore, we truly do not know what we are doing unless we are sensitive about the representation of queer subjects within our studies and actually listen to their voices instead of attempting to contain them within a hierarchical ranking of importance based on seeing participants as numbers rather than human beings.

### **A Self-Reflexive Ethical Mandate in Exploring Queer Subjects**

I have always been transgendered from the earliest memories that I can recall in my childhood. My use of transgender challenges the institutionalization and medicalization of this term in the sense that some members of the trans community and outside the community (also in the academy) have been assimilated into a medical discourse of conflating sex and gender under trans that effectively erases specific trans subjectivities whereby transgender, transsexual, intersex, genderqueer, genderfuck people, among other subjectivities, all become contained within one term -- transgender. I use transgender to mean those individuals, including myself, who have a gender that does not line up with their sexed biological body in terms of the binary of sex and gender. Further, transgender is always related to cultural and historical specificity, so the term is queer in the sense that it is culturally and historically specific and kinetic. My fluid and expressive gender has almost always posed a challenge to the binary of sex and gender in the sense that my gendered subjectivity is literally moving across the imposed bordered limitations of sex/gender. My transgenderism underscores a continuum of gender without poles of masculinity and femininity. My gender(s) are an affront to normative hegemonic ideologies of sex and gender and my expressions have brought pain, suffering and marginalization in my life. My queer sexuality has most often been punished in the form of violence by homophobic reactions because of my transgenderism and my, in Butler's words, "un-intelligible gender" (1999). Chris Straayer (1997) discusses homophobia in relation to transphobia in the sense that "much of the violence enacted against gays and lesbians actually is directed at transgenderism" (p. 221). My marginalization crystallizes a call to action in my research that mandates a priority to search for pervasive methods of raising awareness about oppressed queer subjects. Consequently, my own pain and suffering will inform my approach to qualitative methods by always already being sensitive to "theories of difference" initiated from oppressive domination and violence aimed at queer gendered people.

How we reflect our self within our studies by foregrounding the reasons behind our intent to study queer subjects informs and strengthens an academic perspective when that perspective intends to understand human experience and behaviour, especially when some of this experience and behaviour is often illustrative of trauma, societal alienation, pain and suffering. The methods that we choose in our research impact what we see in research and our positionality affects what in fact we are able to see (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15). Charmaz's perspective is crucial in realizing that our methods are often informed by what we are able to see and consider in our qualitative-based inquiries. In this section, I will articulate how queer qualitative inquiries require self-reflexivity as a practice of ethics that highlights constraint in seeing similar to how scientific discourse constrains qualitative studies. How we negotiate ourselves in the study relates to how we represent others and their respective life experiences and narratives.

In "Voices from the Margins: Voices, Silences, and Suffering," Kathy Charmaz (2009) theorizes that "a view from the margins may emanate from difference; it may also offer significant differences in knowledge, meanings and priorities – a distinctive view, another course of action" (p. 9). I am able to understand and relate to difference as a researcher in my approach to qualitative inquiries because my marginalized societal status will be reflected in

my methods. My passion for conducting qualitative research initiates from a praxis-oriented self-reflexivity that views qualitative work as an “agent of change.” Qualitative research as a form of intervention is discussed in detail in Tony E. Adams and Stacy Holman Jones’ (2011) “Telling Stories: Reflexivity, Queer Theory and Autoethnography.” Adams and Jones state that “a practice of holding seemingly contradictory ways of knowing in tension (Foley, 2002, p. 477), reflexivity is the means – the action, the movement, the performance – by which we engage a personal and queer scholarship” (108). They define the queer as “the telling of a story that critiques (harmful) expectations” and the reflexive as “the understanding, to the best of our ability, how we frame ourselves and others” (p. 113). The framing embedded in qualitative work is a crucial component of an approach to understanding human experience and behaviour that views how we frame research subjects/participants and see them in ways that appreciate their different life experiences and narratives instead of constraining them into pre-constructed scientific empirical models of meaning. Being (self)-reflexive means to tell our own narratives about “being half in and half out of identities, subject positions and discourses and having the courage to be fluid in a world relentlessly searching for stability and certainty” (Adams & Jones, 2011, p. 114). How do we frame our research participants, especially when they are framed in both explicit and implicit ways if the qualitative research is represented in a visual medium, particularly documentaries? How does my own life experience, queer subjectivity and marginalization inform my choices in seeing and framing queer subjects within my study? In “understanding the way stories change and can change, recognizing how we hide behind and become inside the words we speak about and writing the possibilities created by our means and mode of address” (Adams & Jones, 2011, p. 114), our research poses a critical challenge to qualitative methods that operate under a scientific discourse of constraint because our subjectivities inform our methods instead of focusing on an objective position that pretends to separate the researcher from the research (participants).

Queer qualitative methods work to enable the representation of findings to provoke questions that prevents cemented answers (Adams & Jones, 2011, p. 109). Adele Clarke (2005) raises attention to the “crisis of representation” in qualitative inquiries, specifically in her work on evolving grounded theory, by emphasizing an enhanced reflexivity on the researcher’s part (xxvii). Methodologies are required to capture the multidimensional complexities of a participant instead of focusing on achieving simplifications” (Clarke, 2005, p. xxix). My queer qualitative methods, tools for addressing the “crisis of representation,” scientific discourses of constraint and acknowledgement of the self in qualitative inquiry, are as follows. These methods will implement options for studies to be sensitive to representations of queer subjects in our research.

Construct tools that act as a thorn in the side of complacent and traditional methods. Play, pick apart and deconstruct extant tools towards innovation in methodology. Our methods should require some form of self-reflexivity to avoid problematic representations that perpetuate the alienation of queer subjects. Question the question -- always ask questions that expand epistemologies -- in conducting qualitative work -- approach methods as an agent of change that has both practical and academic implications. Finally, qualitative methods should recognize realities of serious forms of discrimination due to oppressive strategies aimed at marginalized subjects. Queer qualitative methods require a constant sensitivity to avoid reinforcing marginalization within a study for the scientific sake of being rational, complete and tidy. These methods surrender to the unknown and the disordered fact of conducting work in the qualitative journeys we travel that seek a welcome window into the lives of others.

## Qualitative Research Limitations: Moving Beyond Complacent Documentaries towards Future Methodological Promises

I will begin this section with an approach to a queer qualitative method employed by Az Hakeem in his 2010 study of trans subjects. Hakeem conducts focus groups in his research of trans subjects and their experiences. Hakeem suggests that “more recent writers (Cheland, 2003), (Hakeem, 2008b) and (Wright, 2006) have conveyed a therapeutic attitude that is more accepting of uncertainty and ambiguity rather than rigid adherence to both heterosexual and binary gender idealism” (p. 144). Instead of searching for stable and concrete understandings of queer gendered subjects, Hakeem’s (2010) approach acknowledges some of the aspects of queer qualitative methods outlined earlier. He states that “when a group member refers to something being “masculine” or “feminine” this will be challenged and analyzed prior to any meaning from it being accepted” (p. 147). Consequently, Hakeem (2010) expands the line of questioning in focus groups instead of accepting that existing categories of gender, masculine and feminine, actually exist at all. Further, “this systematic deconstruction of gender within the group enables the patients to re-value what is actually means, if anything, to be any gender at all and for/to whom this meaning is directed” (p. 148). Hakeem’s notion of the “valency of gender” is emblematic of queer theory’s intent to deconstruct gender and the attached ideological meanings. However, his qualitative methodological approach poses some problems in the area of self-reflexivity and sensitivity towards queer subjects because he fails to recognize within the article that focusing on the “valency of gender” may in fact invoke harm in the participants by calling attention to the artificiality of their subjectivities. In addition, Hakeem’s use of “patients” perpetuates a scientific control over trans subjects that views them as having a pathology that requires treatment under the discourse of gender identity disorder. I think that his approach to qualitative methods in deconstructing scientific notions of sex and gender and questioning automatic responses informed by these notions recognizes an approach to inquiries informed by queer theory. This movement away from an attempt to categorize and contain queer gendered subjects is unfortunately rendered problematic in Hakeem’s forceful intervention to “tell” his research participants how to be instead of allowing them to share their life experiences and narratives without rendering judgment.

In similar ways, the documentary *Middle Sexes*, explores queer gendered subjects by using qualitative methods of interviewing, but frames and sees these subjects in problematic ways that superficially explores its participants without any focus and/or foundation. The film oscillates between exploring both gender and sexuality when it intends to study gender identity. In addition, *Middle Sexes* focuses attention on violence towards non-normative gendered individuals but also celebrates diversity. The film valorizes one “scientific” study of homophobia without providing any context. Therefore, I believe that the film confuses its own study of gender and sex via a superficial exploration that perpetuates a lack of understanding and appreciation for queer diversity. As a result, I will illustrate some of the problems of this documentary, particularly the filmmakers’ approach to qualitative methods that will call attention to the promise of queer qualitative inquiries and methodologies.

*Middle Sexes* presents serious problems to the study of queer gendered subjects using qualitative methodologies of interview-based analysis. First, the research participants in this documentary are framed by a scientific discourse of constraint that conflates sex, gender and sexuality to the extent that sexuality consumes any recognition of gendered subjectivity as distinct from sexual orientation, behaviour and chromosomal sexed differences. In this documentary, gender is erased by the focus on biological sex as determined by external and internal morphology and sexuality. Second, the research subjects are framed/constrained by

several scientific studies that propagate a medicalization of gender that has an ontological and “natural” source in the body that is acted out and influences sexuality. Third, *Middle Sexes* highlights three specific “places” (in the words of the documentary’s narrator, Gore Vidal) -- India, Bangkok, Thailand, and Suriname -- that work to illustrate diverse practices of gender, but this superficial intent to study diverse “cultures of gender and sex” is distracted by a focus on sexuality. And, last, but of equal importance, the documentary opens and ends on a disturbing ominous tone of violence that focuses on a murder of a transsexual by recreating the event. As the documentary states before the closing credits, “the opening and closing scenes in this program were recreations based on eyewitness accounts.” Why frame the documentary by violence and explicitly highlight the specific aspects of the murder? Is this framing device of violence an attempt on the part of the filmmakers, which I do not believe is effective, to call for awareness and action (one of my crucial components of queer qualitative studies)?

The specific filmmaking techniques employed in *Middle Sexes* include voice-of-god narration, “talking heads,” which are “professionals” (e.g., professors, medical doctors and researchers) employed to deliver discipline-specific credibility to the subject matter, research participant interviews, non-participant observation, and participant observation (especially in India, Bangkok and Suriname). Trinh Minh-ha, a feminist filmmaker, theorizes that filmic subjects can be “possessed” in a sense by the rhetorical and political dimensions of the film (Holmlund & Fuchs, 1997, p.4). Fuchs draws on Minh-ha to state that “seeking order conformity and confirmation, such a quest classifies deviance (so that it is reincorporated into the “normalizing,” meaningful system), rewrites subjects as objects of study; and insists on a system of binary difference that obscures complexities and incongruities of lived relations” (Fuchs, 1997, p. 193). I think that Trinh-Minh-ha’s notion, here, is a critical point in understanding how *Middle Sexes* obscures complexities of sex and gender by positioning the documentary’s focus from a scientific perspective that places a magnifying lens on queer subjects by seeing them as objects of study. The documentary manages to objectify its research participants in several ways in a reductive approach. Instead of interviewing trans/queer gendered subjects directly, the first twenty minutes of the documentary relies on family members’ testimonies and the fear they articulate in relation to their queer loved ones. Violence, oppression and hatred of queer subjects is the focus at the beginning, such as Calpurnia Adams – a self-identified transgendered woman – whose American army soldier lover died at the hands of other male soldiers when they discovered that he was dating a transsexual.

The documentary then shifts to a medical understanding of sex-based differences that are articulated as gender rather than sex by the doctors and professors. This section of the documentary frames the subjects that follow from a medical perspective in furthering a discourse of constraint around and apropos queer gendered subjects in conflating them with sex and sexuality. Dr. James Pfaus (Concordia University) discusses the importance of internal and external morphology and chromosomal make-up and the combinations of intersex individuals. Professor Alice Dreger, with Michigan State University, then proceeds to refer to intersexed individuals as people with “conditions.” The documentary finally represents Max Beck, a self-identified intersexed individual, who shares his life experience and narrative quite explicitly in often painful detail. He refers to himself as a “monster” and the documentary frames his interview with a medical training video from 1990 that discusses sex-corrective surgery for intersexed bodies at birth in making a decision on which “gender” to choose. The proceeding sections perpetuate this problem of discussing a medical model/study and/or obsession with “gender”/sex and sexuality and then employing qualitative methods, particularly interviews, in superficially acknowledging cultural specificities of gender and sex, but framing these discussions and forcing us to see queer gendered subjects as

sexualized objects rather than under a “language of difference” that enables polymorphous possibilities.

The documentary focuses on a study by the Dutch Institute for Brain Research, which is discussed by Prof. Louis Gooren (Free University Hospital, Amsterdam). Dr. Gooren discusses a specific study of the “transsexual brain” in relation to their studies in the differences of sexual identity and orientation. The narrator then discusses the study, such as “the brain has not followed” the genitalia in transsexuals, while a scenario is played out where medical professionals are carving a brain out of a body in a hospital setting. This explicit dissection of the body frames trans subjects in a medical model that is preoccupied by scientific-based studies and pathologies. Prof. Milton Diamond of the University of Hawaii then discusses the scientific “fact” that “variation is the norm” in terms of biodiversity; however, he relates this to the diversity of sexuality not gender. Successions of images of the “natural” world are then represented with scenes of animals and plants. If the documentary was intended to explore sexuality then these points would be valid, but it obscures the incommensurable possibilities of gender vis-à-vis the focus on sexuality and scientific discourse. Also, there is a lack of balance between the “talking heads” and the actual participants who have queer subjectivities in the sense that it creates a hierarchy of knowledge that prioritizes the “expert” non-self-reflexive voice over the queer subject.

The specific section on India represents homosociality in the culture and focuses first on sexuality and then the Hijra “culture of gender.” “Culture of gender” enables a focus on the specificities of gender(s) that exist from region to region and culture to culture because there are a diverse range of cultural practices and expressions of gender globally. *Middle Sexes* represents the Hijra in a similar framing device by showing explicit scenes of the surgery that they undergo to remove their male genitalia. Again, a medical model is acknowledged in favor of allowing the research participants to speak about their own experiences and narratives. The documentary, however, frames subjectivities in often gruesome and violent images. The motif of violence and scientific imagery and discourse renders the subjects as objects, which is most evident in the documentary’s section on Bangkok, Thailand. The film focuses on the “culture of gender” of the Kathoey, who self-identify as having a fluid gender. One of the Kathoey performers represented in the documentary states that “I don’t think I belong to any category.” Again, this possibility of enabling a “language of difference” to exist instead of a “language of identity” is foreclosed by this section’s attempt to render the Kathoey as sexualized objects consumed by Western tourists and cisgendered men. Cisgendered means to describe individuals whose sex and gender characteristics “line-up” in the normative sex and gender binary of male/masculine and female/feminine. In particular, the narrator states that the Kathoey are the “fantasy of Thailand” for tourists and that they are “female perfection sculpted out of the bodies of men.” Furthermore, the most significant problem of this section is when the documentary spends close to ten minutes by focusing on a Caucasian man’s obsession with a nineteen-year-old Kathoey whom he left his wife and family for. This focus in the documentary renders the queer gendered subject as a sexualized object and consumes and conflates the three hundred thousand Kathoey the documentary articulates in a generalization that views them objectively. Consequently, this generalization undermines their diverse and incommensurable subjectivities and forecloses any sensitive understandings. In other words, *Middle Sexes’* methods are working against an acknowledgement of queer subjects that furthers a discursive strategy of marginalization.

Postmodern approaches to qualitative inquiry enable researchers to think beyond conventional and traditional approaches to constructing methods that represent sensitive life experiences and narratives. There is enormous responsibility in researching human experiences and behaviour, especially when these experiences are embedded with trauma, pain, suffering and/or even survival and celebration. Qualitative inquiries and methods require

a deconstruction from the static science based foundation that is formulated with a discourse of constraint. The scientific language employed to consider life experiences and narratives is problematic. For example, researchers must take a critical perspective towards labeling these important shared testimonies as “data.” Feminist queer methodologies and inquiries should be a thorn in the side of complacent scholarship. Qualitative inquiries require a queering – a freeing – that enables and appreciates polymorphous possibilities and kinetic subjectivities. A “language of difference” will replace a “language of identity” that is informed by identity politics and obsession in recognizing cultural and regional specificities of (queer) gendered subjects. We need to adopt self-reflexivity as a way of doing ethics for our methods. Indeed, queer qualitative inquiries will enable queer theory to have actual practical implications and influences in stimulating interventions from our narrative-based research. Finally, it is important to be critical of any finality of qualitative work because we cannot possibly include every perspective on a given subject informed by research participants. Do we ever really know what we are doing if the doing is never quite done?

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