

# **(Un)Becoming Queer/ (Un)Becoming LGBTIC**

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## **Introduction**

(KC & DSS) This article is one result of an ongoing dialogue among a number of members of the LGBTIC/Queer Caucus. The dialogue has taken place primarily through a torrent of e-mails, but also through a number of emotionally charged telephone calls. It began as a friendly, (perhaps naively) simple idea –to turn members’ viewpoints about changing the name of our caucus, from “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Issues Caucus” to “Queer Issues Caucus” into an article. What began with good will and a fervent hope for understanding, at times turned into vitriol and contention –volleys of worldviews, personal identities, and philosophies. Although tempers flared occasionally, we feel each of us came to better understandings of the others’ points of view. Editors Debbie and Kim have attempted to distill a bubbling pot of various points of view into an imaginary roundtable dialogue: respecting all stances, without silencing anyone, without

hurting anyone's feelings, and without privileging any one viewpoint. All actors in this drama are named above and identified in the text by their initials.

We apologize in advance.

## **Description of events**

(KC & DSS) Perceptions and accounts of the events leading up to the vote for the name change from the LGBTIC to Queer Caucus are varied. Some members were unaware that a call to vote on the name change was going to take place in Denver, while others of us had been talking about it since the conference in Los Angeles in 2000, under Ruth Slotnick and Anne Manning's leadership. Our first recollection of a discussion about the issue was at the NAEA Conference in Miami in 2002, when Debbie assumed the office of President and Kim assumed the office of Vice President of the LGBTIC. At that time, we were both enthusiastic about changing from the lengthy acronym to what we perceived to be a user-friendlier name. In addition to being easier to say, we also thought that "Queer Caucus" would be more inclusive, as did other members we spoke with at that time. There were then, as now, others present who were opposed to the name change. No official action was taken in Miami.

Discussion continued in Minneapolis at the next NAEA meeting in 2003, during which Jim Sanders was elected Vice President. Kim was not in attendance at this meeting due to illness. Those in favor of the name change were still of the opinion that this was a relatively non-controversial idea. At the Minneapolis LGBTIC business meeting, the group decided to call the question at the next meeting in Denver. In the meantime, members agreed to e-mail each other over the course of the year and to discuss the issue in the *NAEA News* column. Perceptions of the level of discourse that led up to the vote are wide ranging, as Laurel recalls:

(LL) I first received an e-mail message from Jim Sanders, the vice president (November 23, 2003) of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) labeled 'Queer Caucus On-line Newsletter.' Part of the message, sent to members of the LGBTIC Executive Committee, stated, "Given recent court decisions and cases pending, NAEA needs our queer perspectives! We need to share our understandings of LGBT issues with the larger NAEA community, and this is a process that should involve all of us, not just a few voices,"(sanders-iii.1@osu.edu). I was surprised our caucus was referred to as 'queer caucus' before everyone had a chance to discuss the change or vote on it.

Several of us, as members of the LGBTIC Executive Committee, had the opportunity to discuss this among ourselves during the early part of 2004. Then in another e-mail message in March 2004 from president, Debbie Smith-Shank and vice president, Jim Sanders (March 10, 2004) of the LGBTIC, I read that there were plans to change the name of our caucus to the Queer Caucus. I was surprised, perplexed, and confused by these changes. I wondered how all members of the caucus felt about this change and why there hadn't been an on-going discussion via email or listserv about the proposed change. I also wondered where I fit in, as a lesbian, in queer issues and a Queer Caucus.

(KC) Since I was unable to attend the meeting in Minneapolis, I found out about the vote in pretty much the same way as Laurel –through email. The electronic meeting announcement read, “Below is the agenda for our upcoming meeting at NAEA in Denver, April 16-21, some announcements, a proposed caucus name change (we’ve discussed for the past two years) and schedule of NAEA sessions sponsored by and/or presented by LGBTIC members.” Another source of information about the issue was Debbie’s columns in the *NAEA News*.

(KC & DSS) Many issues of the LGBTIC column in the *NAEA News* during 2002 and 2003 were at least partially devoted to the topic of the name change. The discussion in the *NAEA News* culminated in the June 2004 issue, which is partially reproduced below:

One thoughtful discussion over the past year in this column and continuing at the Denver conference was use of the word “Queer” to describe our group of multiple people who self-describe in numerous ways. Both CAA and AERA have changed the names of their affiliate groups to use the designator “queer.” Ballots and wording were sent to paid members before the conference, and at the Business Meeting in Denver the group voted – after considerable debate and discussion. Sixteen paid members voted yes, fourteen voted no, and one person abstained. Because the name change to Queer Caucus won by such a small margin, it was decided to continue the discussion in this year’s *NAEA News* columns and on the Website before actually proceeding to the Board with a written justification for the change. (Smith-Shank, 2004, p. 18)

(KC) As a newly elected co-president of the caucus, I worried about the impact the name change could have on our caucus. I have no desire to go down in the archives as someone who

presided over a mass exodus from the caucus. So, I made the motion to table action on the vote, given the strong, emotional opposition to the change, in order to give us all a chance to come to understand one another. Jim, who had just been elected co-president, seconded the motion.

(JS) This gesture of concern for maintaining a sense of solidarity and keeping the peace by continuing dialogue about an issue that a majority (no matter how slim) has approved, should not be misconstrued as a message that the vote itself has been voided. Such a denial of the democratic process would clearly be in violation of our caucus constitution and by-laws.

(KC) I acknowledge that there are some members who feel that moving to table action subverted the democratic process. However, I feel that the way the process played out was not exactly in the true spirit of democracy. Casting a vote is but one small part of the process. I feel that the discourse that surrounds various issues, and the degree to which such discourse is supported, or thwarted, is at least as important to democracy as the vote itself. It was in the interest of fully enacting democracy that I moved to table action on the vote, and proposed the idea to turn our arguments for and against the name change into an article. There have been a number of times when I could have kicked myself for having done both -I am sure others would have liked to join me on a number of occasions!

(KC & DSS) At the time of the vote, we had yet not given the name change the hours of soul searching and opinion weighing that we now have given to this topic. This article represents the very difficult work we all have undertaken to understand cross- generational, gendered, racial, geographical and other borders to reach a place of

respect for the beliefs of one another. We now have more nuanced understandings of the multiple parameters of the topic(s) that un-becoming the LGBTIC un-covers.

## Discussion

(JS) I appreciate Debbie Smith-Shank's and Kim Cosier's offer to serve as moderators for our discussion around the topic of the Caucus' name change. The website established for our group, dialogue is <http://ets.osu.edu/~mbell/lgbtqic/index.htm>. A search engine and discussion board (to which only paid members will have access for entering opinions – so as not to have our website trashed) are on the site to facilitate dialogue. At that site all caucus members are welcomed to post their queries and opinions on not only this initial topic, but also others they consider important to our mission.

A majority of the 32 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC) members present at our 2004 Annual Meeting in Denver (4/8/04: 17:00) approved the new name. Subsequent to the Denver meeting, Secretary-Treasurer Jessie Whitehead circulated e-ballots to all members not having voted in Denver, to ensure a greater percentage of the membership was counted in this closely contested decision. That e-ballot process was completed by August 22, 2004, with an additional 9 approving and 6 opposing the new name (J. Whitehead email correspondence of 8/22/04:13:07 EDT which included an attached file titled e-ballot results.doc). The combined 25-to-20 vote accounted for 75% of all members' voices being heard on the question of the name change. This follow-up balloting was consistent with the motion made immediately after the announced results of the paper ballot in Denver. Compare this to a US election – where 75% of all voters would be an unthinkable huge turnout!

(LL) Although, I am aware the caucus name change is official, from the LGBTIC to the Queer Caucus, I continue to be left with a feeling of disassociation. Are lesbians disappearing? Can one (un)become Lesbian? Does one need to (un)become Lesbian to be part of the queer circle? Is a queer woman the same as a lesbian? Had the caucus voted to include the letter 'Q' as an addition to the acronym I could accept that. But leaving off lesbian is problematic for me.

(KC & DSS) Part of the reason that we initially began the conversation about the name change, way back in 2002 in Miami, had to do with the unwieldy acronym "LGBTIC." Those of us in that discussion found this "alphabet soup" name to be cumbersome. But it was not only that aspect of the acronym that bothered us, we also discussed the fact that no number of letters could ever cover the many ways that people identify their sexual, affectional and/or gender identities. Laurel's argument is understandable, but we would argue that adding letters to an already long string of other letters is not desirable.

(JS) An almost equal mix of men and women has published an incredibly broad range of scholarship regarding queer theory over the last decade (see for example: Boone, Dupuis, Meeker, Quimby, Sarver, Silverman, & Weatherston, 2000; Blasius, 2001; Butler, 1990; Kumashiro, 2001; Sedgewick, 1990). My use of queer follows Kevin Kumashiro's (2001) framing of the term as an umbrella covering multiple [and multiplying] gender identities, and my interest in the political tactics of the Guerilla Girls, (a multiracial feminist group), Queer Nation (largely gay guys) and ACT-UP (a death-defying HIV activist initiative that transcended interests in identity politics) in demanding visibility and positive social change. As members of oppressed Queer communities

comprised of lesbian, gay, bisexual transsexuals, intersexual, two spirited, curious, supportive and queer peoples (an almost infinite array of political and personal identifications could be listed here), we struggle daily to defend our rights against those who have already lumped us together as a threat to "traditional definitions of marriage." Personally, I feel that rather than debating the caucus naming my energies should have been more focused on defeating Issue #1 on the Ohio ballot;<sup>1</sup> an amendment that may now overturn my university's recent honoring of partner benefits – a law that constitutionally denies my equal rights and protections.

(LL) [Still,] I don't consider myself 'queer' but I do identify as a lesbian. Jeffreys (1997) suggests that lesbians are under threat of becoming invisible within the discipline of Queer Studies. She notes that there is seldom mention or analysis of feminist issues such as sexual violence and pornography in queer theorizing. Despite the fact that organizations such as Queer Nation and ACT-UP have provided lesbians with more confrontational and aggressive style politics, these in-your-face tactics are contrary to strategies of lesbian feminists (Rudy, 2001).

(MR) Queer theory finds its roots in the history of sexuality in general, and homosexuality more specifically. According to Weeks, (as cited in Jagose, 1996) homosexuality has existed throughout history and all societies, but what has differed has been how these societies conceptualize homosexuality and treat those engaged in homosexual activities, as well as how those engaged in homosexual behaviors have viewed themselves (15-16). There are parts



of Laurel's arguments that resonate with me. I do not like the idea of becoming subsumed in a group that privileges (white) men. I think her point...that many men "coast" while women do much of the work is one that deserves attention and consideration, but also deserves a response within queer theories and communities. This creates a situation rife with tensions, though, as men dealing with these issues may then get academic credit for publications using feminist theory to move themselves ahead. I don't know that this is overly problematic, but again, men may be using women's work to just "coast."

(LL) Walters (as cited in Rudy, 2001), notes that queer theory valorizes men and overlooks lesbian specificity. Califia (as cited in Rudy, 2001) suggests that most issues brought to our attention by queer actions are related to men and that gay men are ignorant about feminism. Much of queer theory ignores the issues of lesbian feminists and instead focuses on gay male issues including AIDS research, gay marriage, free expression of sex, cross-dressing, and man-boy love. How do these issues relate to lesbians - to feminist lesbians?

(KC & DSS) Man-boy love is a highly charged topic -and we agree with Laurel that it is probably not at top of a Lesbian feminist agenda. However, we have to ask, since when have issues of AIDS research, gay marriage, free expressions of sexual behaviors, or even cross-dressing been gender-linked issues? Safe, freely expressed sex is not just for gay men anymore! Just as appropriate needle use is not an issue limited by gender. More conversations, not fewer, need to include topics such as funding programs for needle exchanges, safe sex

education, and the needs of babies born with AIDS. We believe that the interconnection of social issues, with an eye toward liberation, is very much a feminist issue. Categorizing issues –and arguing over who is more oppressed than who –these are the failings of identity politics!

(JS) The decision and our dialogue about the shift from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues Caucus (LGBTIC), to the Queer Issues Caucus is important, but while engaging in this discussion, I hope we will put it into perspective.

(KC & DSS) Yes, while we were arguing amongst ourselves, voters in eleven states approved anti-queer/lgbt amendments to their states' constitutions. (Democracy is Dead, Long Live Democracy). We strongly support Jim's argument that we should be working together –though we still feel unsure about whether the name "Queer" supports that end. LGBT/Queer –no matter what you call it, our histories are the histories of the oppression of people who are perceived as other. Those who are in control through the tyranny of colonialism care little about how marginalized people choose to name themselves. queer, lesbian, transgender, gay, intersexed, these names are of little consequence to the people in power who use fear of difference and ignorance as political tools.

(JW) On the other hand, group membership is at times imposed and reinforced by the state, markets, social and cultural practices. Blacks, Latinos, and GLBT populations have historically struggled with the internal and public politics of identity. Politics of identity help build and solidify feelings of pride, empowerment, and political purpose among group members (See Battle, J., Cohen, C., Warren, D., Ferguson, G., and Audam, S. 2002; Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud; Black Pride Survey 2000. New York: The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. [www.ngltf.org](http://www.ngltf.org)).

(DSS) Our identities coexist and signify within our public and personal frameworks. My reflective positioning into spaces that situate me outside my comfort zones is not generally publicly acknowledged. I only reluctantly share them because I'm still working on my self, BUT I am whole only because of the sometimes fractured, always multiple, facets of my multiple selves. Can I un-become? What happens when I absolve myself from union with a facet of myself that has sustained me through months or years of self-knowledge?

The ugly duckling un-became his duck-ness but still had one hell of a time fitting in. The ugly stepsisters cut off their heels and bled to un-be ugly and to fit into a cultural stereotype of beauty. The performance artist Orlan self-mutilates as art, to question us about our responses to the ugly, beautiful, and culturally appropriate. She un-becomes herself for us, or maybe not. But she certainly un-becomes.

What mutilations happen to our psyches when we un-become?

I understand acronyms as one legacy of modernism where efficiency is more important than clarity, and exclusion is prevalent — unless you are on the inside/in the know, you are not privy to the information. Consider NASA, NCIC, NAEA, GM, IAEA, and even SNAFU. You don't have to consider the meanings behind the letters when they serve as placeholders for the words. Consider LGBTIC.

What happens when an organization that is laden with social stereotypical and historical baggage changes its name from an acronym that allows distancing from the signified words in the title to a real word/non acronym word steeped with negative and socially dangerous significance?

Queer. LGBTIC. Queer Caucus. LGBT. Queer. Queer ISSUES Caucus. They don't read or sound the same. They don't mean the same. And they don't signify the same. Connotation/ denotation. What does it mean? How does it feel?

Is queer like Chicano/a and political? What if a member is not political? Is it possible to belong to this group and not be political?

Lesbian. Gay. Bi-sexual. Transgender. What about allies? What about intersexed people? What about people who prefer the anonymity of an acronym? What possibilities exist for exclusion and elitism with either or any of the designators?

(MR) Foucault (as cited in Jagose, 1996) asserts that homosexuality is itself a modern construction developed in the 1870s when medical authorities named homosexuality as an identity and pathologized it as deviant (11). By the late 1600s, an urban male homosexual subculture had developed in London, emphasizing homosexuality as an identity (12). Female homosexuality did not follow the same trajectory as male homosexuality, taking much longer to become the basis for a subculture and separate identity.

In the United States in 1951, the Mattachine Society was founded as a way to create a collective homosexual identity with members who could work together to fight against their oppression. While the Mattachine Society included small numbers of lesbians, many lesbians felt that the group expressed and constructed gayness in ways that, according to D'Emilio (1983, as cited in Jagose, 1996), further marginalized them and their particular concerns and issues (26). As a result, in 1955 four lesbian couples formed the Daughters of Bilitis to address specifically lesbian concerns, but they were continually faced with proving the need for a separate women's organization in fighting against the oppression of homosexuals.

(LL) I still feel that lesbians are left out of the term *Queer*. I often note that when the words 'gay' or 'queer' were used in the popular media there

was no mention of lesbians. The television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* does not include lesbians. Showtime's *Queer as Folk* focuses predominately on gay males and the same network cannot even use the word 'lesbian' in their television show about lesbians, *The "L" Word*. Where are the lesbians?

(KC) Can you imagine? A show in which a lesbian "fab 5" teaches straight "wimmim" the things to consider when choosing a sensible shoe, and the finer points of potluck etiquette. You can only go so far with Birkenstocks and bulgur wheat! In fact, there was a Saturday Night Live segment that parodied the idea of such a show, "Queer Eye for the Straight Gal" –yes, it played on stereotypes –but it was fun and had lots of flannel! And, unlike the real *Queer Eye*, they had an African American character as culture czar (NBC October 4, 2003, Episode 29).

(JW) in *Queer As White Folk*, Boykin (2002) addresses the idea of inclusivity of the term queer. He suggests that despite the claim that "queer" is more inclusive than "gay" and simpler than "LGBT," the word "queer" is just as white as the television show that bears its name, and that it does not represent the vast majority of black homosexuals and bisexuals. Boykin additionally states that he has encountered few Black LGBT individuals who identify as queer; the majority of these few are activists and academics in white settings. Boykin is not opposed to the term, but questions the insistence that queer is an all-encompassing term that represents everyone and transcends race and sexual orientation.

(JS) Inextricably, queer theory is concerned with the concurrent analyses of class, sexualities, critical race and gender theories, and the multiple intersections, overlapping structures, specific histories, and inter-dynamics between forms of oppression.

(DSS) Inextricably, queer theory is indebted to feminist theories since first wave feminism.

(JS) You're so right Debbie, and I couldn't agree more when I use the term queer, again following Kevin Kushamiro's (2001) framing of the term as an umbrella covering multiple [and multiplying] gender identities. Letting go of the safety and surety that identity politics provides, queer theory troubles and questions subjectivity itself. It calls attention to the fluidity and instability of identity. It attempts to disrupt the binary logic of black/white, yes/no, male/female, hetero/homo that defines difference and deviance.

Queer theory calls attention to the ways gender, race, class and sexualities are perpetually performed and perceived by performers in different spaces, cultures and times (See Butler, 1990). It acknowledges that we are never just about our sexual identifications, but also those identifications in dynamic relation to race, gender, class, ability and, I might add, religious and political beliefs.

(KC) Yes, but queer theorists do this in the rarified world of academe –for the rest of the world, queer may be another matter.

(JS) Well for the teens I've been interviewing in the Midwest and southeast, queer is a membership naming amongst friends, not an academic property. Think of *Paris is Burning* (a 1990 lesbian documentary on queer performativity) — it is the younger folks amongst us who may be least fearful of difference or change.

(JW) The results of National Gay Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Policy Institute survey *Say It Loud: I'm Black and I'm Proud* do not support that argument. The study includes information about the family structure, political behavior, experiences of racism and bias, and the policy priorities of Black

GLBT individuals. The sample consisted of approximately 2,700 participants surveyed in nine cities in different regions of the United States during the spring and summer of 2000.

A component of the survey addressed identity, whereby respondents were asked to select one label of identification. "Queer" was one of the least popular labels. Only 1 percent of the respondents self-identified as queer. The authors of the study speculate that there are various reasons for the reluctance among Black GLBT people to use the term "queer":

(a) the lack of identification as "queer" possibly reveals the racism that Black GLBT people experience from White "queer identified" activists in their organizations and campaigns. White "queer" activists are viewed as having greater access to resources and privilege, and embrace a greater fluidity concerning their sexual practices and sexual identities;

(b) the rejection of queer possibly indicates that Black GLBT individuals have not embraced the radical promise of the term as an alternative way (and politics) of sexual identification; and

(c) the low levels of support for queer possibly reveal elements of social conservatism within the general Black community, and specifically in the Black GLBT community. As a result of the study regarding identity, the authors suggest that serious thought be given by political organizations seeking to mobilize Black GLBT people about the use of the term "queer," and the (de)merits of organizing around a "queer" identity. This viewpoint is applicable to the discourse surrounding the (re)naming of our affiliate.

(LL) In many circles, the term *queer* continues to have a negative connotation and may be used as a homophobic label for homosexuals, as it has for decades, if not longer. How can we expect to reach art teachers in the NAEA when the title of our caucus may push them away?

Although, academics in higher education are familiar with the term as a field of study, and are aware that the term *queer* has been reclaimed to promote an activist stance that questions social and cultural norms, many people not associated with higher education continue to characterize *queer* as homosexual men and those who are strange, odd, and different. I have never felt that the term *queer* was as inclusive as it purported to be. As a white, middle class lesbian feminist I never felt part of *queer* folk.

(MR) I find it interesting that the same arguments Laurel makes against *queer* are only a variation of the ones used to criticize feminism. Many women of color or of lower socioeconomic classes have long criticized both feminist and lesbian as terms that privilege white, middle class women, asserting that they do not see themselves as belonging to those identity categories, although many lesbians and feminists would place them within those categories without hesitation.

(LL) I believe that *queer* theory is grounded in camp. Camp that celebrates a parody of the feminine that lesbian feminists tried to expose – learned behaviors of those who lacked power and who were at the mercy of those in power – behaviors such as crossed knees, lowered heads, soft voices, made up faces, high heeled feet, exposed cleavage – behaviors that drag queens misrepresent – behaviors that put women at risk if they don't follow and at risk when they do.



(KC) But camp/drag/cross-dressing/queer gender performances are not just the province drag queens! What about drag kings? Alisa Solomon (1993) noted, in an analysis of drag in the context of theater studies, that most discussions of drag or cross-dressing focus on men performing as women. Focusing only on male performances of femininity she argues “simply reinstates the presumption of the male as universal; he remains the standard, the given, even when wearing feather boas and four-inch stilettos.” (Solomon, 1993, p. 144).

In addition to a male versus female, or gay versus lesbian, point of view, I think the differences in the way camp and drag are viewed have also to do with generational influences. Like Jim, I have noticed that young people are more open to being thought of as queer. For them, gender may be viewed in a profoundly different and more fluid way now than it has in the past (see Halberstam 2005, for a discussion of youth and gender identity). For example, I have been working with a young woman who performs as a drag king/boi. The gender play that happens at the shows is astounding! “Charley” is as popular with young, gay men as “he” is with the young women. For these reasons, I think Laurel’s argument against Queer theory on the foundation that it is grounded in camp needs to be rethought.

(JS) Drag groups not only perform their cross-gender identifications, but also may perform social consciousness raising functions. They, like their outrageous sisters at Stonewall in the late 1960s openly and publicly challenge norms and the oppressions we share, refusing to continue enduring harassment, physically putting their bodies on the line to perform their dissatisfaction. I am not hurt or embarrassed by their bravery but acknowledge their impact in making

marginalized and oppressed sexual minorities visible and audible in our culture.

Camp or outrageous cross-gender performances have provided ways for working through the pains of oppression, for celebrating pleasure, or simply to pass the time (see Sue Golding's 1997 *Eight Technologies of Otherness*, Fabio Cleto's 1999 *Camp: Queer Aesthetic and the Performing Subject*, and Richard Dyer's 1992, *Only Entertainment*). Critiques of some drag queens' female impersonations rightfully have called into question, the recirculation of sexist portrayals of women. Exaggerated make-up, body gestures and sexually suggestive performances can seem offensive. Alternately these may (and sometimes quite appropriately) be read as social critique and commentary on the social constructions of women these (usually gay) men perform. Such queer readings and/or intentions cannot be generalized, but can specifically be investigated and explored, often yielding insights into the self-oppressions in which we still participate. Camp provides both strategies and tactics employed to break free or challenge these oppressions.

The consciousness of the gay and lesbian liberation movement has evolved dramatically over the past 60 years. At first actively organizing (following peoples party politics of the 1940s & early 50s) and proudly claiming minority status as a distinct cultural group following WWII (see Katz and D'Emilio in Jagose, 1996). Threatened by McCarthy and the witch hunts known as the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities, the Mattachine organizing group abandoned its loud and proud stance, assuming instead an assimilationist approach designed not to offend anyone, —leaving it to “authorities” to help those inflicted with difference fit into “normal” society.

Membership in the original liberation organizing groups dropped off dramatically (declining by more than 80% in three years), as there was nothing to really belong to other than the subsequent affinity clubs.

The movement largely languished. It took the African-American civil rights struggles, protests against the Viet Nam War and an active women's liberation movement before lesbian and gay peoples would again renew their public protests of injustice. None of these could be accomplished politely or without offense. It required groups willing to fight and stand up for their rights in very public and outspoken ways.

(MR) Building on the success of gay and lesbian studies in the early 1980s, queer theories (and queer communities) developed with the intent to cut across previously well-defined, constricting, and exclusionary categories of identity, including gender, race, and sexuality. Queer looks at these previous identity categories and examines their problems due to their basis on essentialized and constructed categories of identity. Queer is not about merely combining lesbian and gay, although it examines sexual/gender identity categories, but it is more concerned with suspending identity classifications. Queer theory positions identities as multiple, shifting, fluid, variable, and unstable. Hennessy (cited in Jagose, 1996) believes that 'queer' questions conventional notions of sexual identity by deconstructing, disputing, and disrupting the categories, qualities, and correlated behaviors we have been taught to believe are self-evident and indisputable (97, 111). Queer advocates for the ability to move between and within identity categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, [straight] and also advocates for movement outside of those categories. While all queer theorists would allow for movement from bisexual to lesbian, or even from lesbian to straight, some queer theorists, like Luhmann (cited

in Jagose, 1996), would also include the ability to question and shift among race and class identities.

(JS) These contributions to the literature, and practice (e.g.: political struggles of people with HIV/AIDS), are not always warmly received, as Lyda Goldstein, in "Queer Theory: The Monster That Is Destroying Lesbianville," confirms.

[M]any view queer theory with the same unmitigated horror as did Victor Frankenstein his imprudent animation; it moves as the latest epistemological mutation in postmodernity to stomp lesbian subjectivity into oblivion. As one of many players in the contemporary crisis over binary paradigm, queer theory shakes up either/or and hetero/homo notions of identity. In so doing, the inhabitants of Lesbianville have discovered much to their displeasure that, as Colleen Lamos writes, "it is no longer theoretically feasible nor politically practical to demarcate lesbianism as a unique identity." (1997, p. 263)

More than 500 books have been released under the rubric of queer theory in the past ten years, over 100 more in the last year alone; representing most every academic field of inquiry. Perhaps the most renown and often cited of these queer theorists is Judith Butler, a self-avowed lesbian feminist (see *Gender Trouble*, 1990—a title after John Waters' 1974 cult film *Female Trouble*). Butler's concept of gender performance has its locus in drag, recognizing that we are not simply born this or that, but that we perform our identities daily.

(MR) I think political activism and working against inaction can take many shapes, including actions not typically considered political by people who don't consider themselves to be political. Debbie asks if someone can belong to this group without being political. I believe that just belonging to this group is a political act.

(KC & DSS) Yes, but isn't naming also political? How does that fact come into play if the term "Queer" is still hurtful & demeaning to some members?

(JS) That's called "the real world." It ain't all sweetness girlfriends...

(LL) A member of the LGBTIC who wished to remain anonymous, noted that in his era the word *queer* was very derogatory and was hurled at boys, not girls. As a young boy, he was deeply hurt by being called "sissy" and "queer." The pain was still present when he heard either word.

(KC & DSS) Yes, at the 2004 NAEA conference, members who are uncomfortable with the term Queer approached us both. These are older people who were working during earlier fights for gay and lesbian rights. They are still uncomfortable with words that were, in the past, used to hurt them. We also heard from people who are non-tenured teachers both at K-12 institutions and in higher education, who were uncomfortable being unintentionally outed by the term queer. Those of us who are privileged to work in places that value diversity and gender fluidity must keep in mind that others of us work in less liberated sites. Not only their jobs, but also their selves are at risk in some situations.

(LL) In the world of public K-12 education, organizations for lesbian, gay, and questioning youth are referred to as 'Gay-Straight Alliances.' Art teachers in the public schools may not choose to, or are not able to, use the term *queer* to define who they are or what particular caucus they are connected to in the NAEA.

(KC & DSS) Of course, now the word “gay” has taken on new meanings since our elders were young –when young people says something is “gay” now, they more often than not mean it to be understood as stupid, un-hip or in some way defective.

(JS) So do business as LSQ and drop the Q if that advances you. But many K-12 teachers, administrators, and students are quite familiar with the word queer – not only in its historic hurtful naming applications, but also in its contemporary reclaiming and from what they see on TV.

It is in institutions of higher education that tomorrow’s teachers and teachers of teachers will be trained. Our caucus is comprised of largely higher-education faculty or those trained or training to be practitioners. Aligning ourselves with both those working to change our circumstances today, as well as those helping change the attitudes of the progeny of those most vociferously opposing us, we might eventually reach our goal of fair and equitable protection and human rights.

(KC & DSS) We wonder if changing the name of our group to Queer Issues Caucus more clearly aligns the goals as well as the social and educational needs of pre-service teachers, practicing K-12 art teachers, museum educators, community college teachers, and other higher eddies? We question if it truly does.

(JS) Queer always questions its own constructions, so I consider such questions concerning “queer” to be healthy self-doubt. Even within academe, there has been little agreement about what exactly is meant by queer theory, its methodologies or epistemology (perhaps Sedgwick (1990) is exempted). As a performance and a practice – from writing and reading to research and history – queer as a concept is being widely accepted by those gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups in higher education to which I, and most arts educators could belong

(College Art Association, American Education Research Association). Our group has been the last to join in this more politically active and theoretically sound movement. I accept that someone has to take a stand or we'll continue to remain mired in our self-doubt.

(KC & DSS) Most arts educators are K-12 and working in classrooms. They generally do not belong to CAA or AERA. In fact most art teachers don't even belong to NAEA. While it's true that AERA & CAA have changed the name of their SIGs to Queer, the membership of those organizations is exclusively from Higher Education. The National Art Education Association has always included art teachers and museum educators who work in pre-K through higher education settings. We feel strongly that we must be inclusive of all the members and potential members of our caucus. There are those who may be put off by the term queer – as in queer theory, which is an academic discourse and may be problematic for K-12 teachers.

We do agree that queer theories can be useful tools to challenge the heteronormativity that keeps us all oppressed. It can also be an exercise in intellectual masturbation. Whose self-identity is the most important? Whose oppression is the most oppressive?

(DSS) I acknowledge my need to act within political spaces, but high drama is not comfortable to me. Either by nature or nurture, but certainly by practice, I have become a nurturer and a peacekeeper. I want inclusion, comfort zones for all members, and I want all of us to have a voice – wherever we fit within or outside the acronym. Pollyanna maybe. But if ONLY ONE member who has found an intellectual home and support in this “community with name issues” feels isolated, then I believe that we need to reconsider, reflect, and certainly reconnect gently with each other, and our multiple basketfuls of needs and comfort zones.

(KC & DSS) We struggle with the balance between politeness and in your face aggressiveness. We agree that there are times to get up at arms and get in the face of authority. We doubt that there are any of who have not, at one time or another, stood up to authority and felt the satisfaction of a job well done and/or felt the smack of authority's leather gloved hand on our asses.

We must respect that each one of us works toward a better world in different ways. Using a couple of our heroes as mighty metaphors, (and we acknowledge that both [at least publicly] identified as straight men), we need both Dr. King and Malcolm to come to our minds when we are working toward change. Sometimes we need more help from one and sometimes the other to accomplish our missions.

(JW) As a black person, the recent appropriation of queer reminds me of the similar path taken by some blacks in the use of nigger – the “claiming” of a derogatory term to function as a positive identity. It is my understanding that somehow this appropriation establishes a sense of empowerment. In Debbie's musings regarding the terms, queer, lgbtic, etc., she states that they don't read or sound the same. They don't mean the same. And they don't signify the same. Connotation/ denotation. What does it mean? How does it feel? I can honestly say that calling myself a “queer nigger” does not imbue me with a feeling of empowerment!

(SMMdIG) Didn't we vote in Denver? My question is how do the labels we have been discussing represent the people in our caucus in relationship to art in education? Where are the classroom art teachers? K-12th grade? Are we marketing a product? No, we are marketing a label that cannot and will not fit all. We are a diverse group. Or are we? One Chicana. I can only speak on this issue for myself. I was born Susan Marie Moreno de la Garnica. The name was too long to fit into the boxes on the Iowa Basic Skills test, which of course was the



assessment tool back in the day. My name was then shortened to Susan M. Moreno. The government labeled us Mexicans on our birth certificates. I was born in Iowa. In the 50's we checked the census box (OTHER). In the 60's I called myself Chicana. In the 1970's the government gave us a choice of Mexican American, Native American, or other. Now we are labeled Latino or Hispanic. We as a group need to focus on what we want the caucus to achieve within the National Art Education Association.

(KC & DSS) Susan makes an excellent point—and her words bring up as many questions as answers in this debate: Do we change our identity as we change our name(s)? Would the name “Queer” make our voices heard more clearly within the broader association, or just make us seem louder? Who do we suppose we are speaking for with any change? Will we be able to come to a compromise that will satisfy all members and allow us to speak to/for/about all the folks we wish to reach?

The votes were cast. The queers won. But we have learned an awful lot through this process. Throughout the process of putting this article together, a number of members and allies have suggested alternatives to “Queer Issues Caucus.” One idea that was interesting was, simply “Identity Caucus.” This person’s idea has merit, but since she and others who have made suggestions are not members of the caucus, her voice is acknowledged, but not counted. As this group dialogue has shown, the issue of naming has the potential to liberate, anger, acknowledge, silence, motivate, cooperate, generate discussion, and serve as a catalyst for action. As a result of our year-long engagement with identity, and after much “processing” (as second wave lesbian feminists were so fond of doing), we have come to a compromise that, though not perfect, satisfies us—at least for now.

During the 2005 convention of the National Art Education Association in Boston, almost a full year after the big debate had begun, members attending the annual business meeting came to an agreement. At the Issues Group Board Hearing On March 7<sup>th</sup>, our co-president, James Sanders, confirmed that the process of officially changing the name, from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Issues Caucus to the LGBT/Queer Issues Caucus, would be set into motion. Members are encouraged use any part, or all, of the name as it suits their needs/ desires/ hopes/ political aspirations and the context of its naming. This multifaceted approach recognizes that no one strategy is sufficient to meet the challenge caucus members now face. We invite all to join the LGBT/Queer Issues Caucus, and support the (at-times unbecoming) process of working toward human rights.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Issue #1 is an amendment to the constitution of the State of Ohio, which passed by 3,329,250 / 61.71% Yes votes against 2,065,411 / 38.29% No votes, in the November, 2004 election. It reads as follows:

Be it Resolved by the People of the State of Ohio:

That the Constitution of the State of Ohio be amended by adopting a section to be designated as Section 11 of Article XV thereof, to read as follows:

Article XV, Section 11. Only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions. This state and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance or effect of marriage

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