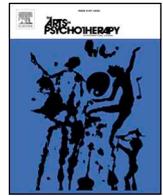




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## Queering our pedagogy: Advancing the training of creative arts therapists<sup>☆</sup>



The curriculum design within creative arts therapy courses is often strongly linked to accreditation. Accountability for reference to marginalised and outsider populations can be pushed to one side in favour of a focus on knowledge of diseases and disorders; avoiding attention to the secondary problems that arise for people when the burden of disease or diagnosis of a disorder bring the additional challenge of having to live in a society that is designed for the able bodied. Similarly without attention to the challenges of outsider status in society which include greater burden of mental distress, and decreased quality of life, therapists in training are ill-prepared for the complexity of practice (Bain et al., 2016; Talwar, 2010). Queering the curriculum is one way to ensure students have access to information and self-reflection that allow them the readiness and openness to work with people from all walks of life; engaging through queer identity or the position of ally (Baines & Pereira, *In press*).

In contemporary times the word queer is understood as an inclusive and empowering term representing multiple points of view but in general directing the reader or listener to a position in which the oppressions of identity categorisations are disrupted and queried. When used homophobically from a stance of bigotry or hatred, queer is clearly intended to denigrate and shame (Luhmann, 1998). However, queer can also be reclaimed to indicate a reflexive, emancipatory position, demonstrating pride in diversity. Describing queering or being queer is to engage a word that has evolved from “slur to affirmation” (Thomas, 2016, p. 35).

Queer theory challenges and disrupts binary theories of gender and sexuality by considering these dimensions of identity as fluid; not static and unyielding (Munro, 2013). Both queer theory and feminism challenge oppression and some researchers and activist consider them closely aligned; for example, Marinucci (2016) and Misgav (2016).

Heteronormativity is a deeply entrenched system of beliefs stitched, like the patriarchy, into our collective consciousness. It is often only through outsider experience, or being marginalised, or by having opportunities to critically reflect, that realisations of heteronormativity can be manifest, and that dominant, ubiquitous constructions of gender can be perceived more clearly as inherently fragile and inadequate (Carrera-Fernández, Lameiras-Fernández, & Rodríguez-Castro, 2018).

Sexuality, identity, and their social and personal contexts are not usually experienced as fixed and unwavering, even if strong normative attitudes are widely prevalent. Queer theory “embraces the freedom to move beyond, between, or even away from, yet even to later return to, myriad identity categories” (Miller, 2015). This work is not just the remit of people who identify as queer but rather all people concerned

with human rights, and the right to self-emancipation; including eco-feminists and those engaging a feminist care ethic.

When straight people identify as queer they hold a position of ally. However, the ability to undertake ally work must be proven over and again; it is not one act at one time but acknowledgement of mistakes, and ongoing accountability for privilege (Reynolds, 2010). As Jones and Calafell (2012) indicated, “An alliance cannot be formed by the privileged transgressing a societal boundary to interact with the marginalized” (p. 975). There is deep reflective work that needs to be done beyond simply describing oneself as an ally.

The role of the ally is to address power, and try to contribute to the making of a space in which the person who is oppressed gets to have their voice heard and listened to. It is not just a matter of being heard; a person’s words must matter and not be dismissed (Reynolds, 2010, p. 14).

The ally creates therapeutic safety by providing understanding, support and care without judgement.

If queer theory, like feminist theory, can be considered a useful way to open up discourse, enliven learning, encourage acceptance and celebration of difference, then it is curious that the creative arts therapies have taken so long to consider queer theory as a way to reflect on, and improve, training and practice (Bayley, 1999). As this expansion occurs, the curriculum will broaden with queer theory also impacting supervision and personal development (Edwards, 2018). Embracing theories outside of dominant heteronormative ways of thinking such as feminist, queer, and critical humanist bring to life therapists’ aspirations to promote holistic wellbeing for individuals that also has beneficial impact on communities and society (Sajjani, Marxen, & Zarate, 2017; Sajjani, 2019).

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Professor Jane Edwards, PhD RMT  
Editor-in-Chief  
*The Arts in Psychotherapy*