

Abstract

Youth who are queer-identified face many challenges in a heteronormative and increasingly homonormative world. Among those challenges is how to construct and maintain performance of a queer identity within the dominance of the gender binary and hegemony of essentialist notions of identity. Traditional developmental theories posit that the goal of identity development is the attainment of a sustainable and fixed identity. While contemporary inquiries into queer youth development have offered some critiques of traditional developmental models, the alternatives generated from these critiques continue to rely on the notion of “development.” This reliance reifies the regulatory regime produced by any developmental model. The very notion of “development” is an inappropriate metaphor to guide queerness; rather, queer is constitutive and non-essentialist, thus requiring a metaphor of construction and performance. Consequently, the queering of one’s identity is consistently threatened by dominant cultural practices that attempt to fix, limit, police, and regulate individuals toward stable notions of the “self.” The purpose of this dissertation is to center the experiences of queer youth by creating a queer space for conversations about identity. As a discursive frame, these insider knowledges will share the page with academic literacies from queer and post-structural theory in support of a radical queer re-conceptualization of identity, therapeutic practice, and youth-adult relationships. This dissertation will attempt to bridge the gap between the practice of therapy and the bodies of scholarship generated within interdisciplinary fields of study such as queer theory and cultural studies.