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QUEER AND QUARE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Robin M. Boylorn and Tony E. Adams

As researchers committed to personal narrative and social justice, we frequently use our experiences to identify abuses of power and instances of harm, offer accounts of marginal and silenced stories, and acknowledge and decenter our own positions of cultural privilege. To assist us with these commitments, we often rely on the aims and practices of queer theory, quare theory, and autoethnography—critical theoretical and methodological orientations that, when taken together, offer insights for using personal experience to describe abuses of power and tools for crafting evocative and accessible accounts of cultural life.

Although we have written separately about the productive relationships between queer theory and autoethnography (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008, 2011; Holman Jones & Adams, 2010, 2014) and quare theory and autoethnography (Boylorn, 2014; Johnson & Boylorn, 2015), we have not jointly or fully explored connections between queer theory, quare theory, and autoethnography—specifically, how autoethnography can enhance quare and queer research. In particular, we wonder: Who can be quare, and who can be queer? Which bodies are most at risk by trying to live queerly, or quarely, in social life? Can Robin, a black heterosexual woman raised in the rural Southern United States, ever be queer or do queer work? Can Tony, a white gay man raised in the rural Midwestern United States, ever use quare theory?

These questions guide us through this chapter. We first describe characteristics of quare theory and queer theory. We then describe autoethnography as a critical research method and discern productive relationships between queer theory, quare theory, and autoethnography. We conclude by offering a quare autoethnography and describe the difficulties in making it queer, and then offer a queer autoethnography and describe the difficulties in making it quare. As we

demonstrate, autoethnography can ground queer theory—sometimes referred to as “high theory” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2011; Derbyshire, 1994)—in lived, concrete circumstances, as well as encourage queer theorists to better acknowledge intersectional understandings of personal experience. Autoethnography can also allow quare theory—sometimes referred to as “home theory” (Boylorn, 2014; Johnson, 2005)—to make better use of reflexivity and excel in its commitment to social justice.

Queer

“Queer” is a term with many uses. Queer can refer to same-sex attraction and/or be used synonymously with “homosexual,” “lesbian,” “gay,” or “bisexual” (Doty, 1993; Demory & Pullen, 2013); describe attempts to disrupt heterosexual—“heteronormative”—expectations of intimate relationships including biases against being single (Cobb, 2012), aspirations for marriage (Conrad, 2010), and assumptions about the importance of familial lineage and biological reproduction (Ahmed, 2006); define messages that rebel against culturally prevalent and insidious promises about optimism (Berlant, 2011), happiness (Ahmed, 2010), and the future (Dean, 2009); and/or refer to affects commonly perceived to be peculiar, inappropriate, incoherent, or disgusting—affects such as failure (Halberstam, 2011), depression (Cvetkovich, 2012), and melancholy (Holman Jones & Adams, 2014).

“Queer” can also be used as a verb. To queer social life requires vigilant attempts to disrupt erroneous assumptions about sexuality, rebel against heteronormative expectations, disassemble culturally prevalent and insidious promises, and/or reclaim affects commonly perceived to be problematic. To queer social life means challenging “unquestioned and taken-for-granted” ideas, identifying “underlying power relations,” and offering “possibilities of resistance and other ways of thinking, doing, living, and loving” (Yep, 2013, p. 119). “Queer theory” is the area of research that investigates any of these uses of “queer,” and being a good queer often means engaging in queer acts.

Although informed by lived experience, queer theory is critiqued for being too dense, abstract, and focused on “‘single-variable’ politics” (Johnson & Henderson, 2005, p. 5)—that is, too focused on issues of sexuality, desire, and/or decontextualized cultural values and affects rather than on the lived intersectionality of social identities, the contexts that inform harmful cultural values, and/or affects that are considered to be taboo. Queer theory can also promote a distrust of identity categories in its framing of identities as fluid and elusive, socially created fictions—a framing that dismisses the lived material experiences of how identities are understood, felt, and lived (Pérez, 2015). Further, given its use of “theory,” queer theory also has been largely taken up in academic spaces rather than everyday contexts of oppression and is therefore seeped in race and class privilege (Marinucci, 2010).

Quare

E. Patrick Johnson (2005) describes quare as being “from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denot[ing] excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of being”; and/or a “lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered person of color who loves other men or women, sexually or nonsexually, and appreciates black culture and community”; and/or a person “committed to struggle against all forms of oppression” who understands that “sexual and gender identities always already intersect with racial subjectivity” (p. 125).

Borrowing Alice Walker’s (1983) definition for womanism, which she developed in response to the unmistakable whiteness of feminism, Johnson’s quare theory was in response to the unmistakable whiteness of queer theory, such as its inability to accommodate intersectional understandings of lived experience, the use of incomprehensible language, and its privileging of single-variable politics (e.g., focusing on oppression tied solely to sexuality and desire).¹ Johnson (2005) expands the definition of “queer” to include “meanings grounded in African American cultural rituals and lived experience” (p. 126) and, like Walker, specifies the cultural, classed, and raced context of a term that has long existed in the speech of black country folk and formally connects it to an intellectual tradition (Phillips, 2006). In other words, quare is inherently black, Southern, rural, and raced; conjures country folk and homegrown knowledge/s (Smith, 1983); and recognizes the heterogeneous experiences of people of color based on intersectionality.²

“Quare” can also be used as a verb. To quare “queer” is to acknowledge the epistemological circumstances of race- and class-based experiences (Johnson, 2005). To quare social life requires an appreciation, understanding, and/or critique of black culture (including homophobia); a resistance of white-washed notions of sexuality and desire; and an acknowledgement of different lived realities in culture-specific communities that both make room for and punish acts and performances perceived to be peculiar, inappropriate, incoherent, or disgusting. To quare social life means advocating for justice, highlighting, rather than dismissing, our differences, and understanding that race and class (always and inevitably) matter. “Quare theory” incorporates intersectionality, and being a good quare often means engaging in quare acts.

Queer and Quare Autoethnography

When understood as a critical method, autoethnography uses personal experience to describe and critique injurious cultural experiences, beliefs, and practices; identify weaknesses of existing research; and ascertain instances of injustice, privilege, and social harm. Critical autoethnography further encourages otherness, both an othering of the self and self-conscious reflection to empathize with the positionality of an identified other (Boylorn & Orbe, 2013). Autoethnographers

accomplish these tasks by engaging in rigorous sense-making and meaning-making of confusing and contentious lived experiences, as well as through the use of reflexivity—that is, by explicitly acknowledging the ways in which their experiences and representations of those experiences are “partial, partisan, and problematic” (Goodall, 2000, p. 55). Further, through the limited use of jargon, technical language, various representational media (e.g., poetry, music), and storytelling devices such as plot, dialogue, and narrative voice, many autoethnographers also try to create evocative and accessible accounts of their experiences—accounts that disrupt the sterility of traditional social scientific research and accounts that can appeal to academic and non-academic audiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

The critical aims and practices of autoethnography offer three primary ways queer and quare theory benefit from the method. First, although quare theory already values lived experience, queer theorists can use autoethnography to ground abstract, esoteric, and impractical concepts in lived, material circumstances. Second, with its use of rigorous sense-making and reflexivity, autoethnography encourages both queer and quare theorists to explicitly acknowledge their positions of marginalization as well as their limited perspectives and political commitments, identify the ways in which their representations enable and constrain others, and offer nuanced, intersectional understandings of personal experience. Third, even though quare theorists aim to create texts that can be used “on the front lines, in the trenches, on the street, or any place where the racialized and sexualized body is beaten, starved, fired, cursed” (Johnson, 2005, p. 129), queer and quare theoretical accounts³—many of those we cite, and even parts of this chapter—are often pierced with sterile and inaccessible prose. Autoethnography pushes queer and quare theorists to consider ways of becoming public intellectuals, particularly through the use of storytelling techniques, various representational media (e.g., blogs, poetry, music), and constructing texts that can appeal to academic and non-academic audiences.

Next, we show quare and queer autoethnography in practice. We first offer a quare tale and describe our (limited) attempts to make the tale queer. We then offer a queer tale and describe our (limited) attempts to make the tale quare. Although autoethnography can enhance the aims and practices of queer and quare theory, we also illustrate the ways in which queer theory and quare theory are incompatible.

Donnie Pig and Gertrude

When I (Robin) was barely old enough to understand the nuances of gender identity and performance, my father jokingly encouraged me to refer to my uncle as my aunt. I refused, not in resistance of the well-intentioned joke, but because there was no need for the announcement of a title before his name to reiterate our relationship. The eldest of my father’s four brothers, Donnie Pig was my favorite. He was the uncle on my daddy’s side I saw most often growing up, the one who

made me feel special, the one who looked me in my eyes when he talked, the one who told me I was beautiful. I relished our time together and the way he talked to me like I was an adult, even when I was a child, and never ordered me out of rooms like everyone else. Unlike my other uncles, who would offer me distant greetings during intermittent visits, he would pat the seat right next to him, inviting me to lean in close so I could soak him up and absorb his goodness. I was drawn to him and unconsciously mirrored his mannerisms. To hear him tell it, I mocked the way he walked when I was a child, sashaying down the hall, switching and swaying my behind before I had one. He was an avid storyteller, telling lyrical lies and recounting memories in his nasal-toned falsetto voice, reenacting dialogue with precise detail, and describing events scene by scene with every family member within ear shot hanging on his every word, laughing out loud to every punchline.

I remember him bragging how he was a “bad bitch” when he cross-dressed and worked the streets of D.C. before I was born, before he moved back home to North Carolina to help take care of his bedridden mother, my grandmother. Donnie Pig, his nickname, was born a boy named Cleveland, though I didn’t know what his real name was until I was 12 and came across a piece of mail with his birth name on it. “Who is Cleveland Jeffries?” I asked my father, wondering why he had a stranger’s mail in his car.

“That’s Donnie Pig’s real name,” my father responded, as if he was reminding me and not telling me for the first time about his brother’s real name. It wasn’t until I held that piece of mail in my hand that it occurred to me that Donnie Pig was not the kind of name my grandmother would have chosen for her first son, but Cleveland, as bold-sounding as the city in Ohio, seemed too hard and harsh a name for my effeminate effervescent favorite.

Donnie Pig was eccentric and unapologetically flamboyant. Even though I knew he wasn’t a woman, in the sense that my mother and aunts were, he was proudly womanish, exaggerating his femininity through embodied deviance. He was a tall man and demanded attention when he walked in a room, only occasionally putting his hand on his hip, almost always exaggerating his bow-leggedness when he walked, his shoulders swaying rhythmically like he was dancing to a beat only he could hear. His high booty and twig-like legs always made him seem too young to be drinking a Mad Dog 20/20 and smoking a cigarette, which he always was. His long manicured nails were sometimes chipped or polished but were always on display as he threw his relaxed wrists around when he talked, eventually resting them on bony knees with his legs crossed. His pecan brown colored face held day-old peach fuzz, almond eyes, a subtle scar on his once-pierced nose, and a mole on the crease of his chin, like me. He favors my father, and I often wonder what he looks like as a woman. He sheepishly grins and unapologetically responds when kinfolk say, “Hey there gal!”

Black folk in the community where I grew up maliciously called men like my uncle “funny” or characterized them as having “some sugar in their tank.”

I understood their words were insults for men who acted like women and who were sexually attracted to other men. No one in my family, who loved Donnie Pig, ever bothered to correct the bigoted comments. As a child, I didn't know how.

My maternal grandmother, Grandma Gert, was mannish and mean. A father-figure in a household without a father, she administered whoopings, cussings out, strict instructions, motherwit remedies, and second helpings of homemade meals she prepared after working 12-hour shifts. Her pre-arthritis hands were not for holding, and her deep voice was not delicate. She was not old, but she was grand. A mother of mothers with the demeanor of a man. She maintained a cool pose and scowl that made her always look mad even when she wasn't. Her smile was reserved for favored grandchildren and Saturday-night spades games, when brown liquor lingered on the bud of a lit cigarette held tightly between her lips. She wore men's jeans that were regularly dry cleaned, starched, and pressed, and she refused to carry a woman's purse, instead carrying a man's wallet (that held her money, driver's license, school pictures of grandchildren, and insurance card) in her right back pocket, which she called her "pocketbook." Her other back pocket held Salem cigarettes and a Bic lighter. On occasion, and at least one Sunday at church, she carried an unloaded Smith and Wesson in her bra. Everybody knew who she was and that she was not to be fucked with.

She liked to wear her slick hair with tight natural curls in a short cut with the edges close to the scalp so she went to a barber, never a beautician. With the exception of a white skirt suit she wore for a family portrait, I don't remember ever seeing my grandmother in a dress. She drank, she smoked, she cussed, she fought with her hands, and she was self-aware and deliberate about her actions. She was stingy with affection, only paying particular attention to me when I was sick or owed a spanking. She did all the things I was told were the bad habits of men. But because she was married, had five children, rotated lovers and special man friends, paid her bills and tithes on time, made homemade biscuits and gravy, and was quick-tempered and easy-tongued, no one ever called her out of her name. No one ever speculated about her sexuality or accused her of loving women. When my cousin, aged five, asked our grandmother if she was a boy, she smacked her lips and said, "Hell nawl," and then went about her business, fixing breakfast plates.

Black folk in the community didn't seem to notice or make mention of my grandmother's proclivities. She wasn't called a bulldagger or dyke like city women accused of being "like that" or "trying to be men." She was never confronted or accused of being a bad mother, bad Christian, or undesirable woman. It was what it was, and she was who she was—a country black woman pinching pennies together and struggling to make sure ends would meet. Survival required masculinity. And her living it out was quare.

Donnie Pig and Gertrude are not actors with agency; they are characters in my autoethnography. They are quare subjects in my quare reading of my lived experience/s with them. Donnie Pig's queer identity, coupled with Gertrude's

quare cultural upbringing, are points of analysis in my attempt at deconstructing the possibilities of quare autoethnography. While Donnie Pig's sexual and romantic preference for men influences his demeanor, his quareness is also connected to his rurality. My grandmother's quare performance of gender challenges false presumptions that gender identity is related to sexual identity or orientation, but it similarly reinforces the currency of black masculinity in black communities in the South. Her quare performance of authority, dominance, strength, and swagger gained her credibility and independence and protected her from public criticism.

A quare autoethnography of Donnie Pig and Gertrude privileges otherwise marginalized and silenced experiences and acknowledges Southern, black, non-gender-conforming identities. A quare reading also speaks to the fluidity of a woman's gender performance that is not afforded to men, especially black men. Although a queer reading would account for the relationship between identity and representation, it fails to consider the relevance and importance of cultural context and intersectionality.

I don't know if Donnie Pig and Gertrude would frame their experiences as quare or unique. However, I do know that they would not frame the experiences as queer. There are significant limitations of queer theory within the contexts of black (queer) lives (Johnson & Henderson, 2005). Because of religiosity and respectability, many of my home folk employ homophobic and heterosexist tendencies in their everyday lives and speech (Boylorn, 2014; Johnson, 2008). Influenced by generational and internalized racism and sexism, they are forced to negotiate the lesser of two perceived evils, in many instances reinforcing intolerance out of fear, ignorance, or both. Queer theory fails to acknowledge that black lived experience, and any critique thereof must move beyond language, performance, and power to account for the ways people of color are disenfranchised and marginalized by racism and classism (Cohen, 2005; Johnson, 2005). I recognize some of the sentiments within my family and community as problematic and homophobic (including, for example, my father's invitation for me to refer to my uncle as an aunt, and the ways my family consciously consumed and absorbed anti-gay rhetoric and slang within the community without speaking out/back, and the rigid gender script/performance required of black men, but not black women); quare theory offers language and praxis for loving critique.

As a child I did not have the language to challenge or fully understand the contradictory messages I received about quare identities, but I knew and understood that, even when queer black folk were maligned, they were still loved (Johnson, 2008). We did not throw each other away. Therefore, a quare intervention involves loving critique that respectfully subverts misconceptions and misunderstandings, while maintaining and protecting relationships. As a black woman academic and feminist with access to "high" theory, I try to queer quare, by calling out offensive comments and problematic language within and without the academy. Quare theory proposes a focused critique in the community in which I was raised and

where I witnessed quare possibilities firsthand. Quare theory, unlike queer theory, emphasizes cultural and social critique within the context of homeplace (Johnson, 2005). In other words, while queer theory is situated within the academy, quare theory lives at home.

In my classroom, I can access the principles of queer theory and use them to disrupt problematic and normative notions of identity and gender—but the challenge is taking those impulses into the community. Homework, or taking theory to my mama's house, is not without complications. I don't actively police my community or consistently correct wrong thinking and problematic language, which would be a queer impulse. Instead, I strategically consider opportunities for intervention and improvement, honoring and recognizing my role in the community and the allegiances and relationships I have cultivated (e.g., black children are taught from a young age to "respect their elders"—a command that is consistent through adulthood—it is important to understand your position and role within the family and community, which occasionally requires biting one's tongue). Although quare theory insists that social and cultural critiques start and end at home, it recognizes the influence of oppression on the lives of the oppressed. Quare theory offers an imperfect and incomplete framework located in the communities and everyday experiences of quare folk of color.

Queer (White, Gay, Male) Bodies

10 p.m. Labor Day weekend in the United States. I (Tony) visit a bar that caters to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer customers. Tonight the bar hosts "Belly Rub Weekend" (BRW), an annual three-day excess eating and drinking event in Chicago that celebrates "chubs" (larger men), "gainers" (men who intentionally gain weight), "chasers" (men who admire chubs and gainers), "encouragers" (men who want to help men gain weight), and men who find chubs, gainers, and encouragers sexually attractive (Adams & Berry, 2013). On this evening, when many of the men greet and pass each other, I notice that they give "belly rubs": a subtle touch, or swipe, of others' bellies—a greeting, like a handshake, with a focus on the stomach.

"Are you a gainer or an encourager?" I am asked by some of the men—a question that, to me, suggests I am too small to be considered a chub yet, given my average physical build, might be someone who has gained, or wants to gain, weight.

"An encourager," I say. "Though I have gained about 40 pounds in the last few years."

An hour into the event, most of the men take off their shirts. Some of the men have small bellies and love handles; some of the men have muscled arms and large bellies; and some men weigh more than 400 pounds. Only a few of the men could be considered "thin." I would also classify most of the men in this space as white, though a few men seem to be Latino.

"Take off your shirt," one man says.

"Let your belly hang out!" another man yells.

I acquiesce and take off my shirt. I am nervous, as I think people are staring at my belly with disgust; I am used to moments when bigger weight is not encouraged and especially not celebrated, especially within the white gay male community—a community that tends to celebrate thin and fit bodies (Adams & Berry, 2013). But here, at this event, bellies are acknowledged and flaunted.

"I'm too thin," a man says to me as I order a beer. "No one pays me any attention."

I look at the (shirtless) man and gaze at his skinny frame. "You look great," I say. "But yes, you are much thinner than most of the men in the bar." I wonder about those moments outside of the event when he worries about being thin.

Throughout the night, men continue to rub bellies, expand bellies by chugging beer, remove belts, and unbutton (tight) pants. They also discuss numerous weight-gaining experiences and fantasies such as disregarding medical advice about expanding size; the swelling cost of food and clothing; the joys of not fitting in desks at school, chairs at the office or on airplanes, and booths in restaurants; worrisome comments made by friends and family members; and wanting to become immobile and bedbound, all the while being fed by an encouraging boyfriend.

As a gay man who frets about gaining weight and who finds bigger men sexually attractive, I celebrate this event and the attendees' talk. I rarely hear about weight and size being celebrated, and, in everyday contexts, I am bombarded by assumptions that thin and fit bodies are more desirable and attractive. As such, I understand this event and these men as queer: They offer alternative ways of living and being in the world (Yep, 2013, p. 119); disrupt culturally prevalent ideas about size and sexual attractiveness, especially the thin and fit gay male aesthetic (Berry, 2007; Whitesel, 2014); and advocate beliefs and practices that others might find to be wrong.

However, if I try to use quare theory to understand the event and these men, I encounter some obstacles. For example, if quare theory values intersectional understandings of lived experience, can I offer an adequate understanding of intersectionality, escape my whiteness or my maleness, or ever know about how it feels like to be a "lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered person of color" (Johnson, 2005, p. 125)? No. I can only speculate about how a person of color might experience the event; speculate about what it means, and how it feels, to be a non-white body in the predominantly white space; speculate about the microaggressions—those subtle, covert, and seemingly innocent slights—that persons who do not pass as white might experience. I also note that such speculation can be condescending, dangerous, and an act always already stained with the (white, gay, male) privilege of being able to maneuver the event with ease.

In my attempt to be quare, I can turn to others who have written about race, sexuality, and attraction and think about the possible ways racism and sexism exist

at the event. For example, I think about Dawson's (2015) writing about his experiences as a black gay man who has gone on dates with white gay men—those times when white gay men claim to want “BBC” (big black cock) or “Blk [black] ass”; or when they ask about the size of his penis; or when they offer him money for sex. Dawson changed his dating profile to ask (white) men not to make such comments and, in response, offended some white men yet received praise from men of color. Dawson even noted that although men of color “receive messages online for sex by white guys,” they are often ignored at predominantly white bars and “overlooked by bartenders.” Would the white men at BRW treat black men in these ways? Would bartenders overlook black bodies?

I also think about Eguchi's (2014) writings about race, sexuality, and hegemonic masculinity, and how particular bodies, especially gay Asian bodies, may be perceived as feminine, submissive, and secondary to “straight-acting” white bodies. Like Dawson, Eguchi describes disparaging interactions with white gay men as well as the difficult times ordering “drinks from the White bartenders,” how these bartenders have treated him as a “stupid foreigner,” and how “bartenders of color” never treated him in such degrading ways (p. 281). I wonder if the (white) BRW bartenders would overlook Asian bodies or treat them as stupid foreigners? Or would the BRW men—men who desire bigger and fatter bodies—respect “skinny little Asian bodies” (p. 280)? I can only speculate: I assume many BRW men would disregard skinny men, unless the skinny men desired bigger bodies, but I do not know if the bartenders would disregard bodies that did not pass as white—an acknowledgement of ignorance as I cannot escape my white body, and an observation about whiteness in that I may never recognize if and when a bartender has mistreated me because of my race.

Although I have offered a limited discussion of race and sexuality, I am even more speculative about how a body perceived as female or transgender might experience BRW. I have attended BRW for two years, and I observed only cismen (or people who pass as cismen) attend the event; to my knowledge (or ignorance!), no ciswomen were ever present. I also cannot effectively understand the classed aspects of the event, only to note that men most likely learned about BRW via an online community of chubs, gainers, chasers, encouragers, and admirers and, as such, had to access, and know how to use, a computer or a Web-enabled device. Further, once at BRW, attendees need excess money to spend on alcohol or have the social capital (e.g., attractive appearance, relational skills, and being perceived as white, male, able-bodied, etc.) to flirt with men who might buy them a drink.

I also wonder about the privileges of being able to obtain a bigger size and still be able to maneuver social interaction with ease. More specifically, which bodies can gain 50 pounds easily, without severe judgment or consequences, and without the weight gain being attributed to their race, gender, or character?

As a white man, I speculate that I could gain 50 pounds without receiving too much critique; I assume that I am able to expand more safely compared to white women who gain the same amount of weight and who are often held to

unattainable and unhealthy standards of thinness. I think about the recent celebrations of “dad bods”—that is, (heterosexual, white) men who gain weight after fathering a child and who no longer worry about maintaining a thin and fit physique. Are “mom bods” equally celebrated? I also speculate that I can gain weight without having to worry about how my size reflects on my race, of being perceived as unhealthy or gluttonous or as failing to maintain a “skinny little Asian” body (Eguchi, 2014, p. 280).

BRW espouses queer sensibilities in that it disrupts norms of body size, desire, and sexuality, and I can use queer theory to offer important insights about the event, especially for anyone (only men?) interested in celebrating bigger, expanding bodies. However, queer theory—with its lack of, and inability to effectively consider, intersectionality—also grants me the privilege to not think about who can (not) be queer and what being queer costs in terms of social privilege; I can avoid thinking about how BRW may perpetuate harmful goals of consumption, perpetuate norms of inclusion and exclusion, and possibly even promote racist, misogynistic, and classist desires. As such, I turn to quare theory to help with intersectionality, yet I get stuck in speculation, unable to effectively describe how the event is lived by bodies that are not white, gay, or male (or even middle-class, urban, able-bodied, etc.). I am able to offer a queer account but not a quare account, and I am unable to make my queer account quare.

Conclusion

Queer theory and quare theory promote productive conversations about power, privilege, and social justice. Queer theory is most productive for disrupting heteronormative expectations of intimate relationships; rebelling against cultural expectations tied to sexuality and desire; reclaiming peculiar, inappropriate, incoherent, and disgusting affects; and offering new possibilities of “thinking, doing, living, and loving” (Yep, 2013, p. 119). Quare theory is most productive for resisting white-washed notions of sexuality and desire, offering homegrown knowledges and appreciations of black culture, illustrating the necessity of intersectionality, and acknowledging our communal relationships and allegiances.⁴

Autoethnography can also help quare and queer theorists excel with these commitments. Queer theorists can use autoethnography to ground abstract, esoteric, and impractical concepts in lived, material circumstances. Queer and quare theorists can use autoethnography to explicitly acknowledge their limited perspectives and political commitments, identify the ways in which their representations enable and constrain others, offer intersectional understandings of personal experience, and construct texts that can appeal to academic and non-academic audiences.

However, in doing queer and quare autoethnography, we realized lived experience is not translatable: Robin couldn't queer and Tony couldn't quare. When Robin tried to queer her story, it wasn't white enough. When Tony tried to quare his story, it was too white, too male, and too focused on sexuality. Further, Robin

had to think about how she identifies with quareness because of her Southern rural upbringing and as an ally, not because of her sexual identification; and Tony had to consider the privileges that come with being able to live in queer ways and wanting to disturb the (cultural) peace in terms of body size, sexuality, and desire.

But we can turn these limitations into productive lessons. Robin can use queer theory to fuck with gender, sexuality, and desire, to identify as heterosexual yet also find ways to critique heterosexism and participate in queer activism in her home communities. Tony can use quare theory to acknowledge the significance of intersectionality yet also refuse to appropriate quareness as his own (a white act!), recognizing he is able to speculate only about how it may feel to be a queer person of color traversing predominantly white spaces—especially those high academic spaces—in which he dwells.

Borrowing words from Cohen (2005), “[we] would suggest that it is the multiplicity and interconnectedness of our identities that provide the most promising avenue for the destabilization and radical politicalization of these same categories” (p. 45). Together, we can engage queer and quare autoethnography to continue our commitment to inclusivity and social justice, deconstruct and decenter our own positions of privilege, and make space for maligned and silenced stories and representations.

Notes

- 1 As Johnson (2005) writes, “Some queer activist groups . . . have argued fervently for the disavowal of any alliance with heterosexuals, a disavowal that those of us who belong to communities of color cannot necessarily afford to make” (p. 130).
- 2 See Cooper’s (2015) article for an explanation of intersectionality as an account of power, not personal identity. Cooper argues that intersectionality is about not race, class, and sex but about racism, classism, and sexism.
- 3 In response to Johnson’s quare theory, Lee (2003) offers “kuaer theory” to represent race consciousness, womanism, and transnationalism. She embraces quare theory but proposes a further departure to represent her personal account and a critique of intersectionality.
- 4 Johnson (2005) states, “[Q]uare studies offers a more utilitarian theory of identity politics, focusing not just on performers and effects, but also on contexts and historical situatedness. . . . Quare studies grants space for marginalized individuals to enact ‘radical black subjectivity,’ by adopting the both/and posture of ‘disidentification.’ Quare studies proposes a theory grounded in a critique of essentialism and an enactment of political praxis” (p. 141).

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