

Queer Theory, Ethno/Musicology, and the Disorientation of the Field

Steven Moon

We spend significant time and space in our academic lives positioning ourselves: within the theory of the field, in regard to the institution, within networks of interlocutors, scholars, performers, and so on. We are likewise trained to critique those positions, to identify modes of power in their myriad manifestations, and to work towards more equitable methods and theory. That is, we constantly are subject to attempts of disciplinary orientation, and constantly negotiate forms of re-orientation. Sara Ahmed reminds us that we might ask not only how we are oriented within our discipline, but also about 1) how the discipline itself is oriented, and 2) how orientation within sexuality shapes how our bodies extend into space (2006). This space—from disciplinary space, to performance space, to the space of fieldwork and the archive—is a boundless environment cut by the trails of the constant reorientation of those before us. But our options are more than the dichotomy between “be oriented” and “re-orient oneself.” In this essay, I examine the development of the ethno/musicologies’ (queer) theoretical borrowings from anthropology, sociology, and literary/cultural studies in order to historicize the contemporary queer moment both fields are experiencing and demonstrate the ways in which it might dis-orient the field. I trace the histories of this queer-ing trend by beginning with early conceptualizations of the ethno/musicological projects, scientism, and quantitative methods. This is in relation to the anthropological method of ethno-cartography in order to understand the historical difficulties in creating a queer qualitative field, as opposed to those based in hermeneutics. The first section places the problematics of this enumeration in dialogue with the ethno/musicologies’ tendencies towards nationalizing and globalizing narratives that often run contrary to a queer project. In working at this larger scale of social interaction, it is difficult to understand the intricacies of sexualities and their relation to local normativities—that is, the project of nation-building from the nineteenth through late twentieth centuries makes difficult discussions on genders and sexualities as they exist within ethnic, racial, dis/abled, or religious minority groups subsumed by the nation-state. While both national and global perspectives are useful in understanding mass media and politics, as well as in answering the *cui bono* question, they often lose sight of individuals and their complex negotiations

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of identity and place. This section draws on what one might consider the early queer ethnomusicological literature to illuminate this nationalizing tendency.

The second section steps back in time to understand how music studies, broadly, entered the queer conversation through early feminist literature in ethnomusicology and historical musicology, as well as literary/cultural studies and anthropology. Beginning with historical musicology is critical to a thorough understanding of queer methodological development and its trajectories through the 1990s to eventually enter ethnomusicology in the early 2000s. By examining the disciplinary conditions that gave rise to queer studies within specific fields and not others, the expansion of ethnomusicological theory and method comes into greater relief. This analysis results in ethnomusicology's broader adoption of queer methods through popular music studies in the third section of the paper. Popular music studies is a common meeting point for ethnomusicology and historical musicology as an interdisciplinary sub-field. Popular music studies reveal that global circulation and localized analysis might be coalesced, allowing for analysis of the individual's sexuality—especially within the “cult of the celebrity”—while also capable of making larger trans/national claims about identity, performance, and politics. Further, this section considers much of the most recent queer ethnomusicological literature as being directly influenced by the popular music studies trend. This is followed by a discussion of recent work in trans studies in music. Noting differences between the orientation of queer and trans theories, this fourth section examines the ways in which trans theory does important work on the local level—that of the performer and audience having a personal interaction—while also creating space for larger discussions on gender, race, vocality, and embodiment.

In the final section of this paper, I consider the previously outlined histories and, through select recent works in ethnomusicology, suggest a way forward for a queer/trans-inclusive ethno/musicology. I consider the significant transformations that ethno/musicology has undergone, where it might be headed, and how a queer and trans studies change the discipline at large. I ask whether the delineation of a queer or trans ethno/musicology is not just possible, but necessary at all, and what a queer methodology might look like and function as vis-à-vis contemporary approaches.

Taking a Head Count

In her 1993 survey of lesbian/gay studies in anthropology, Kath Weston analyzes the emergence and difficulties of the discipline's theoretical adaptation, noting that “having identified such glaring lacunae in the anthropo-

logical record, the prescribed remedy initially consisted of calls for research and a concentrated effort to ‘get some data’ (1993, 340). One method has been ethnological cartography (“ethnocartography”): mapping ethnological data collected by ethnologists, anthropologists, and other social scientists. The goal of these maps, according to Branimir Bratanic, is the “...ethnological reconstruction of cultural history,” and that “[a] genuine, correctly designed research map ought to present its material in such a way that it will be possible to draw corresponding conclusions from various and characteristic distributions of culture phenomena in space (1979, 101-2, emphasis in original). The practice of ethnocartography in studying gender and sexuality might be likened to finding a critical mass, to the empirical mapping of ‘known’ homosexual behavior in, to use Weston’s language, ‘nonindustrial’ societies, most nearly pointing to the Global South. The documentation of a critical mass serves as an authenticating or legitimizing process which brings lesbian/gay studies—and with it, lesbian women and gay men—into the house of anthropology, although it is framed by “an old fashioned [sic] empiricist project allied to a hard-won understanding of the sexual politics that continue to target lesbian and gay male relationships in Anglo-European societies” (1993, 341). Data collection, even in the social science of anthropology, was critical to the demonstration of qualitative value: there are many lesbian women/gay men around the globe, so therefore their lives deserve documentation.

In a retrospective on the development of “queer” anthropology and its progress since Weston’s work, Tom Boellstorff notes that ethnocartographic practices are “often linked to forms of identity politics” (2007, 21). Boellstorff echoes Weston in saying that these ethnocartographic practices, meant to yield empirical data, are often conducted without the use of theory, which Boellstorff writes “presumes that concepts name preexisting entities and relations, rather than asking how the social is produced and sustained through acts of representation...In place of ethnocartography, one can see encouraging signs of a ‘critical empiricism’ approach that although not fetishizing “data” nevertheless demands that theorizations be accountable to their subjects of study” (2007, 19). The ethnographic difficulty of locating, “enumerating,” and theorizing on global queer politics have thus been a hindrance to several of the social science disciplines, including ethnomusicology.

Owing much of its methodological underpinning to cultural anthropology, ethnomusicology might easily be read through these anthropological histories. The disciplinary methods of ethnomusicology have changed considerably since the mid-1900s when such texts by Alan Merriam and Jaap Kunst were composed. In Merriam’s 1963 *The Anthropology of Music*,

the exact quantitative approach discouraged above was the explicit goal imagined for the ethnomusicologist. Merriam writes, “[t]he conclusion is almost inescapable that what the ethnomusicologist desires is not that subjective, qualitative, discursive, esthetic, and so forth, but rather the objective, quantitative, and theoretical, wherever this is possible” (1963, 20). This formulation seeks a certain legitimacy within the artistic-scientific binary Merriam discusses, arguing that the ethnomusicologist should seek precisely the enumeration that Boellstorff condemns. Of course, they are writing a half century apart, and Merriam’s conceptualization of the field is that of an empirical social science—Merriam seeks to “provide a theoretical framework for the study of music as human behavior; and to clarify the kinds of processes which derive from the anthropological, contribute to the musicological, and increase our knowledge of both conceived within the broad rubric of behavioral studies” (1963, viii). The lens of behavioral studies is one of the biology and evolution, so Merriam’s framework for ethnomusicology is deeply situated in a numerological empiricism.

An inclination towards quantitative methods here is unsurprising as Jaap Kunst, writing prior to Merriam, traces ethnomusicological history to, among others, British mathematician Alexander John Ellis, whose work focused on a history of pitch written through the mathematics and physics of sound (1959). Kunst provides a mathematical explication of pitch which contextualizes Merriam’s quantifiable (albeit less mathematical) approach to ethnomusicology. For Ellis, and others of his time, mathematics helped to understand differentiation in tonal/pitch systems from around the world. Of course, this methodology runs the risk of a “European greatness” teleology from Pythagorean ratios to Lomax’s cantometrics, but nonetheless represented the contemporary ideology regarding the study of musics outside the European art music canon, as well as assumptions about the identity and role of the quintessential ethnomusicologist (see Burnim, 1985).

Mantle Hood, writing in the decade after Merriam, continues to refer to the ethnomusicologist as “scientist” (1971). While Hood notes that ethnomusicology is necessarily interdisciplinary insofar as the study of music and culture can draw on art, folklore, history, and more, Hood simultaneously believes in the education and perpetuation of an ethnomusicology based in quantitative methods, detailed diagrams and mathematical precision. However, this is balanced to a greater degree in *The Ethnomusicologist* against the anthropological, which is less present in Kunst’s work.

The move towards continually more anthropological approaches to the study of music meant an increasing inclusion of theoretical frameworks from other disciplines, as well as following anthropology’s lead in

moving away from the behavioral model towards social constructivist models inclusive of the sex/gender differential. In her 2014 retrospective *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender*, Ellen Koskoff writes that the early feminist work in ethnomusicology, particularly from the late 1970s and early 1980s, “led the way to deeper understandings of the importance of cultural constructions, not necessarily biological givens, for the study of music and its gender imbalances,” and that the new ethnomusicology “sought to understand music not simply as a product of human behavior, but also as an interpretive site for enacting and performing gender relations” (26-7). Moving away from the mid-twentieth century quantitative mindset, away from Merriam’s preference for “the objective, quantitative, and theoretical, wherever this is possible,” allows for more nuanced analysis of the cultural constructions at play in musical practice, those which affect the quantitative data collected by early ethnomusicologists but were either ignored or reduced to biology (1963, 20).

These quantitative methods—the main reference of the word “scientist” as used by Merriam, Kunst, and Hood—elucidate the complex relationship between ethnomusicology and other social sciences, such as anthropology and sociology. While one can find both qualitative and quantitative methods in both disciplines, anthropology and ethnomusicology both center qualitative methods, primarily ethnography, in the 1980s and 1990s alongside the rise of post-structuralism. While quantitative methods remain useful in the sociological study of society and large-scale systems, this type of analysis requires significant qualitative contextualization and analysis, particular in the study of gender as a cultural construction. Alongside race and dis/ability, gender is one of the most significant of these constructions which came to light only due to the work of women that studied gender as social rather than biological.

Moving from feminist literature to queer theory comes with great difficulty not only in reference to methodologies and theories, but also to career stability and reputation. Weston credits new focuses on lesbian/gay studies to “the efforts of a hardy few who risked not only their censure but their careers,” highlighting the precarity of the queer-ing scholar in the academy (1993, 339). These sentiments are echoed decades later by Will Cheng and Gregory Barz in the Oxford University Press blog announcement of their edited volume. Cheng and Barz theorize ethnomusicology’s late arrival to queer theory as follows:

Maybe it’s because ethnomusicology was in a sense already queer (a disciplinary outsider relative to music history and music theory), and as such, scholars saw little need for explicit articulations of queerness. Maybe ethnomusicologists have harbored anxieties precisely about their

queered status in the academy and have therefore disavowed direct address of queerness in their work for fear of further marginalization. Or maybe the varying challenges, affordances, and pressures of scholars' disparate field sites have impeded harmonious and ethically sound dialogues about queerness (out of concerns about culturally relative currencies of gender and sexuality) (2015, online source).

This volume (discussed below) takes queer methodologies, queer musicians, queer field sites, and queer ethnomusicologists as not mutually exclusive subjects and objects of the discipline, but as interconnected and constitutive of ethnomusicology. But Cheng and Barz use queer above in a more expansive way, referring to ethnomusicology's "outsider" position. But even here, queer cannot be divorced from gender and sexuality, as the explanation given here echoes several of the sentiments expressed by Weston. To do queer work is to be queer in a way, and to be queer is worse yet, especially during these periods of development. For the fringe ethnomusicologist during the rise of queer theory, a lack of institutional security is a serious threat, according to the authors, even while the anthropological turn to lesbian/gay studies occurs much earlier in the discipline's history. But the anthropologist remains safe within the institution, broadly, following the importance of anthropology to the colonial projects of American and European history. The ethnomusicologist is already peripheral.

Narratives of the National and Global

The lone comment on Cheng/Barz OUP blog post, written by Jonathan Stock (University College of Cork), suggests that "part of the answer lies in the habitual focus on groups/societies (as opposed to individuals)" (2015, online source). Stock points towards a queer methodology which might be rooted in a more phenomenological approach to the individual as the locus of experience rather than focusing on practices at large. Weston's ethnocartographic analysis does not point to the enumeration of individual queer people in the world. Instead, it might be understood as searching for a quantitative search for evidence of entire societies which host queer sexual practices of any kind. By refocusing on the individual rather than the group, Stock implicitly encourages an understanding of sexual politics from the individual's point of view. The queer person living in a society which might deny or prohibit their existence could serve as the center, then, for how queerness interfaces with normative politics, providing information on larger social structures and how the individual navigates heterosexist power.

In *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*, Nettl makes a similar observation regarding "women's music" and feminist eth-

nomusicology. Nettl notes, “It may strike the reader as a curious observation, but I feel that in much of the ethnomusicological work by women there is a focus on an individual musician and (frequently) her story, a tendency providing a needed corrective to the cultural generalizations common in the mainstream of literature” (2005, 418). Nettl points towards a perceived urgency to the matter of understanding women’s music “on equal terms, though not necessarily identically, with men’s” in order to provide proper recognition, as well as to develop an understanding of how gender relations vary between cultures (2005, 418).

From here, we can zoom out to take a larger view at the nationalizing narratives of ethnomusicological scholarship. Deborah Wong notes that “we often emphasize nationalism and globalization, manifesting a deeply internalized need to prove our discipline is doing important work (i.e., just as important as anthropology) despite the double feminization of our field” (2015, 178). This double feminization—as a “soft” social science, and as an outsider amongst those—rearticulates Cheng and Barz’s assertion that the ethnomusicologist was always already “queer,” working on the peripheries of academic institutions. Negotiations of queer theory, globalism, and postcolonialism are the topic of much contemporary work, and grappling with transnational queer theory means dealing with culturally relative notions of queerness. Due to this tension, national/global frameworks remained dominant and kept “queer” at bay.

This is not to say, however, that the two are irreconcilable. Tullia Magrini’s 2003 volume *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean*, includes a chapter by Martin Stokes on Zeki Müren, a queer Turkish singer who was beloved during his lifetime, as well as a chapter by Svanibor Pettan on “sworn virgins,” in Kosovo, or “transgendered [sic] individuals who are genetic females [and] become social men, living masculine lives” (Dickemann, 1997, quoted in Pettan, 293).¹ Stokes’ chapter is a precursor to his 2010 monograph *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music*, and asks how queer singer Zeki Müren, and his relationship to the nation of Turkey, might be understood as not peripheral, but rather, hypernormative. Stokes provides a nuanced analysis of Müren’s homosexuality in relation to broader discussions of sentimentality, Michael Herzfeld’s notion of cultural intimacy, and the complex performance politics of the gazino in order to argue that Müren not be displaced to the theoretical fringe, but rather, understood within a larger and ongoing process of national sentiment-building in Turkey. Müren dealt expertly with media and cultivated a large female-fan base which assisted in side-stepping controversy. Stokes’ chapter, then, demonstrates two points. First, celebrities and other public personae lend themselves well to the analysis of local/global

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processes of gender (see Section 3. Queer Beginnings). In being “public,” celebrities’ relationships to the nation are distinctly different than those of non-celebrities, making queer projects possible. Second and relatedly, Stokes demonstrates what queer analyses might look like, maintaining a localized subject of analysis while placing it in national or global contexts. However, we might ask about how the possibilities of the project might differ if it weren’t focused on a public figure, if it instead focused on queer musicians without fame, as the narrative would change substantially.

Pettan’s chapter on “sworn virgins,” on the other hand, does not bring a queer analysis together with a national framework, but excludes it. Part of this is due to his working in Kosovo both before and after the breakup of Yugoslavia, as well as working with the Roma community at large, both of which resist traditional modes of understanding nationhood. Pettan discusses the sworn virgins as “cases,” using a medicalized language which removes them from the broader public narrative. While Pettan likens sworn virgins to trans men (see above), and notes that “[t]hey were in most cases referred to as men, and referred to themselves in masculine terms,” they are referred to as “woman,” “she,” and “her,” throughout the chapter (Dickemann, 1997, quoted in Pettan, 294). The sworn virgin comprises only a small part of the larger chapter’s analysis and sits beyond other analyses of presumably cis-gender musicians. We might read this as a tension once again between local sexual practices and nationalist narratives of identity. That is, while sworn virgins’ identities were accepted in society, according to Pettan, this acceptance was only granted insofar as they adhered to dominant values of celibacy. To have a sexual relationship with a man purportedly signaled identity as a woman. (2003, 294, 299). This prescription of gender identity on the basis of nationalist sexual values highlights the tension between the locality of gender identity and its larger social function in the project of nation-building.

Stokes stands as the sole exception to the case I have outlined here: national and global narratives are prone to exclude queerness from the moment they are invoked, and a methodological/theoretical shift is necessary for a queer ethnomusicology to arise. Stokes’ chapter’s exceptionality is due, in part, to factors that will be discussed in the next two sections: a move away from dominant/normative nationalizing narratives, and a move towards popular music and the celebrity. In these sections, Stokes’ chapter will gain more context as a movement towards a queer ethnomusicology, to be explicated in the final section.

Some have cited Carol Robertson’s “Power and Gender in the Musical Experiences of Women,” as the first queer ethnomusicological work, which appeared in Koskoff’s 1987 *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural*

Perspective, an edited volume which stands also at the beginning of feminist ethnomusicology. Robertson draws on fieldwork in Ghana, Argentina, and Washington, D.C. in order to offer a comparative approach to the (new) focus on gender's relationship to music. Robertson's queer contribution comprises one paragraph of her article, describing female impersonators as a powerful performance method for dramatizing masculinity and male dominance. Robertson's understanding of drag is that "American transvestite performers, known as 'drag queens' for example, often portray in costume and demeanor the trickery and 'bitchiness' that they attribute to women" (1987, 229). Robertson's chapter might not then represent a "queer" contribution to the literature insofar as it places gender-subversive performance within her own list of marginalized identities: "sodomy, adultery, incest, celibacy, physical abuse, homosexuality, and lack of conformance to closely defined social roles and hierarchies of authority are all targets of public criticism" (1987, 229, emphasis added).

Where Robertson fails to provide nuance regarding sex, sexuality, gender, and orientation, all of which might complicate her analysis of drag queens vis-à-vis women as a supposedly unified category, Marcia Herndon echoes Koskoff in placing great importance on the sex/gender differential. Herndon emphasizes gender, or the "culture-specific, inconsistent and variable precept that has more to do with social roles, age and status than with biology," as being critical to understanding the relationship between biology and nature (1990, 12). This approach, according to Herndon, is critical to understanding localized ideas/the development of gender roles specific to one's research site. Further, in separating gender from sex, Herndon provides critical development to feminist ethnomusicological methods which largely focused on women as a universalizing category, one which collapses gender and sex into one entity. Herndon concludes that "[t]he study of music and gender, then, is not simply a matter of describing male and female domains, styles, and performance types. The focus on gender and sex, biology and culture, adds depth to the analytical understanding of issues and problems" (1990, 26).

The gender/sex separation noted by Herndon is key to the proliferation of work on music and gender across disciplinary lines, but musicologists were the first to arrive at queer work. In 1989, the American Musicological Society founded its Gay and Lesbian study group, and a year later, presented a panel on "Composers and Sexuality." The 1993 volume *Queering the Pitch* was the direct result of the efforts of these musicologists, especially editors Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas.² Musicological adoption of gay/lesbian studies involved the direct translation of post-structuralist hermeneutics from literature into musical practice, assuming

the composition to be a text which one can read. The volume, then, is comprised of new readings of the Western canon, new ways of understanding how sexuality affects the position we take vis-à-vis musical literature.

Suzanne Cusick's famed chapter "On A Lesbian Relation with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight" offers a multivalent approach to identity: "The 'I' who loves that work seems to me to be the 'I' with whom I speak in Italian, she who exists a priori of the 'I' musician, the 'I' woman, the 'I' lesbian" (1994, 69). Cusick understands her positionality in relation to music as one predicated upon multiple identities, each of which carries its own signifying power. These identities, particularly "lesbian," are not nouns, nor are they stable categories, but rather "way[s] I prefer to behave, to organize my relationship to the world in a power/pleasure/intimacy triad" (1994, 73).

Cusick's triad is a powerful framework for understanding gender broadly, and queerness specifically, one which we might read through Deborah Wong's "Ethnomusicology Without Erotics." Wong defines erotics as "the place where the affective and the structural come together and where corporeal control is felt and made visible...Erotics are where bodies meet bodies and where subjectivity comes home to roost in a body" (2015, 179). In such a broad definition, Wong necessarily notes that erotics are not constrained to sex, to women, to queer people, but rather must include heteronormative values: "[a]ll musics rely on erotics" (2015, 179). Read through Cusick's triad, Wong's discussion of the erotics creates space for the study of music as it relates to any and all gender relations, not specifically the sexual or corporeal. By understanding gender and sexuality explicitly as power, pleasure, and intimacy, we might more clearly see and be able to critique the heterosexist dynamics which have been able to render themselves silent/invisible/ "unmarked" while forcing out queer and demanding its legibility. "In critiquing heteronormativity," Wong writes, "we not only would address one of music's most powerful siren songs but at the same time could queer ethnomusicology in critically useful ways" (2015, 181).

Wong's critique of ethnomusicology sharply contrasts the erotics of musicology in the 1990s. Wayne Koestenbaum vividly recounts his memory of losing flesh to music, of being entered and consumed by "the opera queen." Referred to by the author as "a scrapbook," *The Queen's Throat* draws connection between the (presumably white, cis-gendered, upper middle class) gay male and the opera queen of bel canto, who "doesn't expose her own throat, she exposes the listener's interiority" (1993, 43). Such an unfolding of the listening subject, for Koestenbaum, is a queer experience, a new way of engaging with musical performance and text. Koestenbaum focuses the

text on the throat as both a material and metaphorical location for the study of operatic performance and listening, as the location of not only the voice, but “as a place where gay men come into their own” (1993, 156). As one of the first gay monograph in the field of musicology, the erotics are made immediately clear—again thinking through Cusick’s triad, the power, pleasure, and intimacy of the operatic voice in performance and consumption is an undeniable paradigm shift, changing how musical signs are interpreted by audience members and scholars alike. Additionally, this book appears only one year prior to *Queering the Pitch*, marking 1993/4 as a significant moment for the direction of musicological research.

Of course, the musicological development of queer theory was rooted deeply in other humanities disciplines. Most notably, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* in 1990 shifted feminist theory and significantly aiding the rise of queer theory. Butler explicates the notion of performativity, writing that both “biological” sex (itself a constructed category) and gender are performed through the body, in both gesture and speech act, and gain semiotic stability only through constant reiteration. By understanding gender/sex as performed, these social principles are usefully detached from the body and the medicalized narratives which gave rise to their biologization (for context, the contemporary usage of gender versus sex came into popular use only in the 1960s).

Performativity has thus had a profound impact in all gender-related research, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. Simply in sharing the term “perform” allows Butler’s theorization to be easily understood in musical contexts, although Butler’s primary example is drag performance. Further, referring to “everyday gender,” we might call it, or our mundane daily experiences of ourselves as gendered beings, as performative blurs the line between staged performance and our routine lives, allowing gender to be studied on the stage and on the street in much the same way. It is perfectly sensible then that musicologists, opera scholars in particular, grasped this theoretical shift. The opera volume *En Travesti* (1995), appearing shortly after *The Queen’s Throat* and *Queering the Pitch*, is comprised of five musicologists and seven literary theorists, which further demonstrates the importance of hermeneutics to early queer work. Judith Peraino’s chapter, which imagines a lesbian social structure through Purcell’s witch utopia, harkens back to work by McClary and Cusick which was instrumental in the rise of a post-structuralist musicological methodology, shedding the skin of heterosexist analysis (which supported heteronormativity by skirting the issue altogether). Most significantly, Mitchell Morris, perhaps for the first time in print, explicitly identifies as a “queer musicologist,” marking the early import of a queer political economy. While *Queering*

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the Pitch uses “queer” in its title, its theoretical utility is not taken up in the volume—many authors instead revert to the model of gay/lesbian studies.

After all this musicological contextualization, it can be difficult to imagine where ethnomusicological endeavors fit in. As noted above, there were several impediments to the social sciences’ adoption of queer theoretical models. The musicologists noted here found their way into queer analyses through the hermeneutic methods of literature, employing a queer musicology that is rooted in erotics, pleasure, and power. However, the transition into ethnomusicology required a common object of inquiry: popular music studies. The next section provides an overview of the transition from queer musicology to queer ethnomusicology, if we might use that term, occurring in the early 2000s, in large part due to the two disciplines’ meeting within popular music studies.

Popular Music Studies

Popular music studies in ethnomusicology has developed over the last several decades, becoming institutionalized within the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1996. Popular music now comprises a large portion of publications in journals and presentations at ethnomusicological conferences. Because popular music studies’ methodologies are far-reaching and interdisciplinary, it is unsurprising that ethnography and historiography have brought musicology and ethnomusicology together, sharing an object of inquiry (albeit often from different parts of the world). This meeting point is where queer theory makes its leap from musicology to ethnomusicology; while the disciplinary methods are different, the common object allows for its transference.³ I argue here that popular music studies has been, and remains today, a critical site for the development of a still-unresolved queer ethnomusicology which continues to shape ethnomusicological research trajectories.

Aside from Stokes’ and Pettan’s contributions to Magrini’s 2003 volume, early developments in queer ethnomusicology appear in the 2006 volume *Queering the Popular Pitch*. “Queer” becomes critical in this volume, unlike its precursor *Queering the Pitch*. According to editors Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga, “[b]y using the word queer—as opposed to lesbian and gay—the authors show how same-sex desire can be foregrounded without designating which sex is desiring/being desired and, as such a certain fluidity is achieved that refuses gender-based constructions. In short, queer becomes the taboo-breaker” (2006, xiv, emphasis in original). In explicitly adopting queer, the contributors of this volume claim a commitment to a gender politic which does not subscribe to male/female, gay/straight binaries, instead opting for a framework which exists beyond them.

The appeal of queerness for popular music is, in part, that many performers' lives and personae circulate widely, and sexuality is made public. Putting aside the ethics of the cult of the celebrity, the availability of an individual life—the life of an artist, a band, a genre—allows a localized analysis, as compared to the nationalized/globalized narratives discussed above, and by Wong. When the eroticism of the individual becomes a commodity, a queer analysis is made much simpler. As argued above, the erotic and the national might be understood as standing in opposition to one another, and thus the heterogeneity of popular music lends itself more easily to queer critique.

Popular music studies in ethnomusicology also allows for a greater focus on audience and consumption, as opposed to the dominant paradigm of studying musicians/performers. In Stephen Amico's contribution to *Queering the Popular Pitch*, interlocutors' communities revolve around celebrity artists who exist at specific identitarian intersections. Amico's chapter asks how gay Latino men constitute place through their movement towards urban centers while bringing with them a taste for Latin house music. This interaction, between "what is already there" and "what they bring," is critical to Amico's analysis of gay male Latino sexual practice and music consumption. Rather than focusing on the artists themselves, Amico focuses on what the artists have come to represent to their listeners, and how artists' work has been coopted for specific projects of gender expression. Amico's work here is representative of a shift in the larger ethnomusicological object of inquiry, one which is specific to projects on popular music and sound studies.

Jason Lee Oakes' approach is similar in his chapter, "Queering the Witch: Stevie Nicks and the Forging of Femininity at the Night of a Thousand Stevies," focusing on the fandom of one particular artist taken up as a gay icon. The differentiation between Oakes and Amico occurs at the usage of queer. While Amico's interlocutors were self-identified gay men, Oakes works with a broader range of sexually identifying people who impersonate Stevie Nicks. Oakes notes that at the Night of a Thousand Stevies event, where impersonators of all genders come together for events that honor the artist and recreate her performances, "[t]he Stevies themselves range from straight women and men to cross-dressers, transgenders, and others who defy simple categorization. It is often not clear whether a given performer is biologically male or female, performing in drag, is oriented gay or straight, or somewhere in between" (2006, 47, emphasis added). In surveying such a broad range of music consumers under a queer umbrella, Oakes uses queer (like the editors of the volume) to resist heteronormative binaries rather than as a synonym for lesbian and gay (2006, 48). While

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Oakes notes that queer, in its subversive power, is still most often coded as femme, Oakes provides a critical framework for using queer beyond lesbian and gay, one which is still largely not taken up. A queer ethnomusicology, based upon Oakes chapter, might begin to appear as one which does not take gender as niche or optional, but instead centers it at all times.

Some of the most current queer work in ethnomusicology has come in the form of drag. Work by Sarah Hankins, Moshe Morad, and Alec MacIntyre, among others, examines drag performance—perhaps the most ubiquitous performance practice for exploring gender performativity—as the site of a queer politic that alters the ethnographer-interlocutor, voice-body relationship, and gender-culture relationships. Each author engages drag performance with popular music in some respect and highlights the importance of embodiment as a queer mode of knowledge and performance for both the audience member and the performer. Hankins offers queer hermeneutics based upon experiential fieldwork, writing, “[a queer relationship with music] is embodied, aroused, and situated. Arousal dissolves the boundaries between self and music by opening up the somatic apparatus to music’s energies, and arousal enables the individual to locate herself, and to locate music, within social power structures that are undergirded by a sexual order” (2014, 87). “Queer” necessarily blurs lines, those which we often assume to exist between the self and the other, between the body and not-body.

Connecting the popular/mass-circulated to the local, these authors each engage celebrity-status through local effect in a move which offers methodological suggestion. Amico picks this up in *Roll Over, Tchaikovsky!: Russian Popular Music and Post-Soviet Homosexuality* by studying not Russian popular music stars themselves, but rather their reception, embodiment, and use by gay men living in Russia. Amico positions popular music as a tool for use by gay men towards the construction of a sexual self-vis-à-vis dominant attitudes regarding homosexuality in Russia. Like Hankins, Morad, and MacIntyre, Amico explores the uses of popular music—a very public performance of sexuality—by those who perform their sexuality as individuals. However, Amico steps beyond performance to discuss music consumers who are not performers themselves. While those above discuss drag performance, Amico recounts everyday, commonplace usages of popular music consumption in creating a gay Russian subjectivity. In doing so, Amico moves again in a new direction, suggesting a queer ethnomusicology that explores the role of music and sound in queer mundanity.

The visibility and locality of individual performers in many of these popular music case studies allow ethnomusicologists to study the politics

of identity—sex, gender, orientation, identity, performance, presentation—within musical contexts at the scale of both singular artists and mass audiences. While Gavin Lee notes the importance of destabilizing gender in the study of popular music in his introduction to the new volume *Rethinking Difference in Gender, Sexuality, and Popular Music: Theory and Politics of Ambiguity*, popular music studies can and must take seriously self-identification as a material condition of existence, regardless of academic theorization (2018).

Trans Theory

The academic discipline of trans studies has grown exponentially since the 1990s. One of the first publications to stake out the field and its importance was Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," which responds to Janice Raymond's 1979 *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. Stone recounts auto/biographical narratives of trans women as well as the history of university-run gender dysphoria clinics in order to expose the mischaracterization of trans identities by Raymond, to demonstrate "[t]he initial fascination with the exotic, extending to professional investigators; denial of subjectivity and lack of access to the dominant discourse; followed by a species of rehabilitation" (1991, 163). Stone argues that the making of history "is partly a struggle to ground an account in some natural inevitability," and that while these struggles often ignore the materiality of the body, the voice of trans peoples are often ignored in reference to precisely their own bodies:

Here on the gender borders at the close of the twentieth century, with the faltering of phallogocentric hegemony and the bumptious appearance of heteroglossic origin accounts, we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories, and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body: a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type (1991, 164).

Arriving concurrently with, if not slightly earlier than, queer theory, trans studies rests upon many similar premises—for example, Stone's epistemology of gender that is disruptive to both sexual dimorphism and society's blind adherence to it—but key differences in methodology and citational practice have led to the fields' distinctly different characterizations, as well as unequal representation in other disciplines, including ethno/musicology.

Queer theory is often employed through the verb "queering," an ill-defined mode of deconstruction whose uses range from "getting to the queer root of the matter" to "taking something straight and making it queer." The

former harkens a Butlerian understanding of gender's totalizing performativity, wherein there is no essential gender to be found anywhere with-in or with-out the body or one's subjectivity. The latter is a tepid mode of critique that grants ontological status to an object's normativities by implying that it is not-yet-queer. Queering also functions as a common entry point for queer theory into a not-yet-queer or otherwise straight discipline. This reveals a motivation to make queer that which is presently not or reveal its true queer nature. In this sense, queer theory often faces outward, mushrooming across fields and forests of academic work and demonstrating a subterranean interconnectedness of gender.

Trans theory is tangibly different in its methodology and citational practices. While one "does queer theory" through engagement with and citation of a canon of authors—Judith Butler, Michael Warner, Jack Halberstam— "doing trans theory" is less reliant upon an agreed-upon body of work. Susan Stryker and Jay Prosser, for example, might be considered some of the most prominent scholars of trans studies, but have not been canonized alongside Butler or Michel Foucault. The creation of a queer disciplinary core is critical to the queering project, providing a foundation legible to outsiders, a place to which queering can point. But trans theorists do not seek "to trans," do not engage in "transing." Trans theorists are specifically interested in the lives of trans people. While the implications of trans theory reverberate across non-trans identities, especially in regard to the plasticity of the body and the category of sex, this work is about and for trans lives in particular.

While the body of trans scholarship in music studies is growing, it is perhaps less visible because it does not engage in a form of changing the field. There is no "transing ethno/musicology." Meanwhile, the queer ethno/musicological cup overflows with queering: *Queering the Pitch*, *Queering the Popular Pitch* and the forthcoming *Queering the Field*. Each of these volumes queers in its own capacity.

Much ethno/musicological work on trans musicians occurs within the realm of popular music. Shana Goldin-Perschbacher writes on "TransAmericana," or Americana music written and performed by trans musicians. Goldin-Perschbacher argues that because of normative assumptions within the genre of Americana, it is an attractive and rich site for trans and queer musicians to play with genre and identity. One of these artists, Joe Stevens, also appears in scholarship by Elias Krell and Randy Drake. With a background in performance studies, Krell writes extensively on popular music by trans and genderqueer artists and focuses in particular on transvocality as a method of understanding how musicians' and audiences' bodies are affectively moved in performance. Drake draws

on ethnographic research with jazz musicians, Americana musicians, and trans choruses in order to think through musicking as an embodied method of configuring trans identities.

By focusing on particular artists or groups, Goldin-Perschbacher, Krell, and Drake can more closely examine individuals' embodied experience as the making of identity. As noted above, popular music renders public individuals' lives in such a way that ethno/musicological analysis can be rooted in the individual rather than focusing on nationalizing/globalizing narratives. Of course, the popular music subject is understood within broadly-circulating discourses on gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, and law. But such artists might also be understood as a crystallization of these intersecting cultural valences of identity.

This further highlights the tendency of trans studies to focus on locality. There is no "transing" of the field. Rather, these scholars present frameworks for understanding the unique position of trans subjectivities vis-a-vis music studies. This is not to say that trans studies in music is insular or without wider reach. On the contrary, trans studies in music fundamentally rewrites the relationship between gender and sound. While feminist musicologists of the 1980s and 1990s make a distinction between gender and sex in an important way, this has caused many discussions of music and gender to draw our attention away from the flesh, tossing gender about through either theoretical readings absent of the body, or through material studies that ultimately reify rigid sexual dimorphism. Gender's deconstruction, in other words, often occurs in our classrooms and analyses in such a way that relies upon a stable notion of sex: a specific version of the body to come home to. But scholars from trans studies and feminist science studies demonstrate that the body is pliable; that it bends under pressure, it tears and sutures as we please (Gill-Peterson 2013; Hird 2004; Mikkola 2016). Trans studies in music demonstrates that our analyses of music and gender are never in reference to a static body, but a body in motion, one which continually re-creates sex in the same way that it re-creates gender through repeated performative moves (Butler 1990, 1993; see also Eidsheim, 2012, 2015 on race, gender, and the body in singing and listening).

By thinking through the relationship between trans songwriters and audiences with Krell, Drake, and Goldin-Perschbacher, we might redefine the musicking body in performance as one engaged in the ongoing creation of the body itself. This is not entirely dissimilar to the work of early feminist ethno/musicology. Ruth Solie, for example, argues for a total reconceptualization of music as a social force rather than simply a reorientation of the field towards the contributions of women throughout history (1992).

A trans studies approach offers a new angle on the category of “women” here, reducing it to neither a strictly defined gender performance (womanhood) nor to a particular body reduced to pieces under the guise of biology (female). Sex is thus a constantly re-iterated, re-created body untied from genetics, anatomy, and social expectation that is performed much in the same way as gender. For some, the loss of sex’s theoretical stability may be disorienting. This dizziness is the moment from which scholarship on music and gender will continue to flourish. Reliance upon sex is simply a positivist mode of cis-gender heteropatriarchy. No more than one can willingly and consciously change their sexual orientation can disciplines built upon imperialism and cis-heteropatriarchy be easily shifted. It is only through the complete disorientation of both the discipline and its object can fields change.

Moving Forward, or Coming Closer

There is great difficulty in writing a queer history, because queer, by many definitions, exists beyond linear models of time. Of the question, “when did jazz go straight?”, Sherrie Tucker answers, “those would be straight questions; linear when/then, who/them Q&A. I am going for queer here, Q with a Q. As a queer question, ‘when did jazz go straight?’ flies at a bit of an angle, scanning the horizon for queer instances in which jazz appears to ‘go straight,’ when people ‘go straight’ to jazz, or when jazz gets called upon to represent ‘straightness’” (2008, 1). Attempting to write a queer history of ethno/musicology is a process confined by straightness. Queerness weaves through discourse without regard for disciplinary lines, making appearances only when you are looking for it.

Following Tucker, we might understand the question “when did ethnomusicology go queer?” as one which attempts to straighten a history unnecessarily. As noted by Cheng and Barz far above, “Maybe...ethnomusicology was in a sense already queer (a disciplinary outsider relative to music history and music theory)” (online). Pinning down the moment of queering is not a fruitful project, nor is debate regarding whether the discipline is inherently or requires queering. Rather, a disorientation of the discipline represents a fuller embrace of the methodological possibilities. Instead of queering, or taking something un-queer and making it queer, we should consider de-straightening a field which might have never been straight to begin with. Following Ahmed, “queer does not have a relation of exteriority to what with which it comes into contact” (2006, 4). That is, queer did not collide with music studies—we are continuing to find what is queer about what we do, and in what we do. This is not to say that queer advocacy is unnecessary; on the contrary, it is more important than

ever. But queer ethno/musicology might begin to appear less like an ethno/musicology of queer people, less like the use of queer theory, and more like a reframing of ethno/musicological inquiry which foregrounds gender in all instances, which makes central the relationships of our work—ethnographer/interlocutor, historian/archive, critic/performance— as formative, complex, and dynamic.

The study of these relationships, of gendered modes of power, is not a theoretical framework to take or leave. That is, the implicit heterosexuality of those who “don’t do gender studies” is a specifically queer issue. As it relates to gender, sexuality, and politics, queerness is often defined or understood as resistance to normativities. The importance of queer work is framed by language of “awareness and advocacy.” But what do these mean if our institutions are still built to keep queerness out, or at least to the side? If they are built to perpetuate particular models of methodological or theoretical training? So long as queer continues to be defined as being an outsider (see Barz and Cheng above), so long as queerness is relegated to a week of the syllabus, or an elective course outside core curricula, problems of cis-heteronormativity and whiteness will persist in our disciplines.^{4 5}

In thinking through the queer hermeneutics offered by Hankins above, we might also consider a hermeneutics of vulnerability, which Sidra Lawrence claims “will perhaps yield new layers of... knowledge not previously revealed. In making ourselves vulnerable and in looking deeply and with thoughtful consideration into those vulnerabilities through an interpretive framework, I hope that we broaden not just what we know but what we consider to be knowledge” (2017, 483). Taking “queer” and “vulnerable” together brings us back to Cusick’s power/pleasure/intimacy model, leaning particularly on the third prong, which sees the ethnographic encounter, or the musical encounter, or any number of other interactive iterations, as being a point of intersection. We so often call this point “power,” but lack the truly intersectional approach many have advocated here.

Thinking through vulnerability forces a reconsideration of other intersections of identity, especially race and disability, each of which would be critical to a queer or trans method. Kyle DeCoste’s recent article on the Original Pinettes Brass Band takes a queer-intersectional-ethnographic approach, asking how the band musicians’ identities as black/queer/femme shift discourse on the gendering of musical instruments and performance. Working through black feminist theory and ethnomusicology, DeCoste argues that each of these intersections is critical both on its own and in conjunction with the others, meaning the performance cannot just be understood as black, femme, or queer, but as distinctly all three at once, requiring an intersectional framework (2017).

Some scholars beyond ethnomusicology have questioned the need for a “queer-” or “trans-” designated discipline. Anthropologist Ellen Lewin, famous for work on lesbian mothers, and editor of the 1996 *Out in the Field: Reflections of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists*, has since questioned what queerness has to offer that was not addressed in earlier feminist approaches to anthropological methodology. Arguing that queer theory has gone too far in separating itself from monogamy and other homonormative respectability politics, Lewin disagrees with relabeling “lesbian and gay studies” as “queer studies” (2016). Lewin stands in stark contrast to the sociologists of Catherine J Nash and Kath Browne’s volume *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*. One contributor to the volume, Alison Rooke, notes that queer ethnographic practices are critical to “addressing the assumed stability and coherence of the ethnographic self and outlining how this self is performed in writing and doing research. To queer ethnography then, is to curve the established orientation of ethnography in its method, ethics, and reflexive philosophical principles” (2010, 25). Rooke’s assertion of a queer ethnographic method might be read as similar to a feminist ethnography. However, many such feminist methods lack a queer approach to being femme, one which does not function as resistant to masculinity but rather escapes the masculine-feminine binary altogether. Queer methods, in the field or in other arenas of research, might gesture towards a total disregard for the male/female, hetero/homo binaries in favor of nuanced accounts which don’t collapse back onto sexual dimorphism.

In ethnomusicology, we have seen early signs of this in some of the work discussed above. However, very little has moved beyond popular music studies. Jeff Roy explores hijra-s’ becoming third-gender/trans-gender through documentary filmmaking, a method that Roy believes can queer fieldwork because “[q]ueer methodologies seek multiplicity in favor of singularity, and ways of perceiving of and representing time and place that subvert hegemonies of perspective” (2015, 113). Citing Nash and Browne’s volume, Roy offers one way forward. Much the same as other ethno/musicological methods and theories, queer theory and method might come from beyond the disciplinary walls. Aside from working on queer performers and people, Roy (and others) has offered a method which is not only necessarily reflexive but is hardly definite. Queer and trans are rarely places one finds an object to be examined, but rather are ongoing developments without direction or goal. Thinking a queer and trans ethnomusicology through the texts examined here, we must consider the binaries and boundaries our projects create, and work towards their disorientation. Each moment of (queer) ethnographic present represents not only per-

formers' or listeners' becoming, but our own un-becoming. In eliminating authorial distance, in seeing ourselves alongside/within our object of study, a queer/trans method for ethno/musicology might surface.

Such a disorientation requires significant work on behalf of all working in our fields, including/especially those who might say they “do not work on gender studies.” Gender studies—much like work in critical race theory, ethnic studies, and disability studies—remains an “area of interest” or a “specialty” rather than a core component of ethno/musicological inquiry. Gender studies remains on the shelf, taken down by most often by women and queer people (those who “have gender”). Jobs in our fields rarely seek out a scholar in gender studies, instead largely hire based upon geographic area and time periods. The result, according to Tes Slominski: “...whole areas of study are becoming disciplinarily queer and disappearing” (Slominski 2019, 228).

Being queer, doing queer work in ethnomusicology is, for me, about proximity, about being close to and entangled with the work. “Distance” appears regularly in discussions of methodology and epistemology and is often noticeably absent of “closeness.” Critical distance, for example, is the hallmark of white heterosexist patriarchal critique: taking on the role of the unmarked, unbiased bastion of objectivity. Slominski notes that in ethnomusicology, distance is something of a disciplinary litmus test, assigning “market value” to work that takes the (white) ethnomusicologist too far away (brown/black) places (2019, 229). Several ethnomusicologists in *Queering the Field* discuss distance in both geographic and affective terms, distancing as a process of negotiating varying identities in the field. Sarah Hankins notes that this distance is particularly prominent in ethnomusicology, compared to historical musicology where “some queer musicologists have written graphically about their bodily, emotional responses to musical sound,” and quite critically, that “I am not certain that ‘positionality’ is the same thing as ‘subjectivity’ or ‘self’” (2019, 361). Following Ahmed, the question of where we are and how we are oriented might guide us in more interesting directions (see above). For me, it is in the moments of closeness that borders rupture, in the messiness of sex and intimacy and we can theorize ourselves and others. “Queer ethnographers will always face messy, complicated realities of difference in our fieldwork,” writes Hankins. “At times, we won’t be able to get our bearings—but those moments might be opportunities for our richest, most nuanced ethnographic work” (2019, 362).

Approaching our work “from a distance” is a distinctly white, cis-gender, heterosexual, and able-bodied methodology. Rather than being free from bias, it requires deep inquiry into power structures embedded in race,

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ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability, particularly about ourselves. It necessitates that we understand ourselves not only as ethnographers who are situated along these lines of difference, but also as ethnographers who have sexual lives, who are sexually situated within our field sites, even in the absence of physical sexual/intimate contact (see Hankins, 2019). Nicol Hammond argues that,

doing ethnographic fieldwork is like having sex: relational and intimate, capable of being deeply pleasurable, deeply uncomfortable, and deeply damaging—sometimes all at the same time. And like sex, fieldwork is implicated in a complex and slippery web of consent, power, pleasure, norms, intentions, responsibilities, vulnerabilities, and desire that need to be examined if we stand any chance of approaching and ethical practice. (2019, 53, emphasis added)

With echoes of Cusick's model of pleasure/power/intimacy, and Lawrence's hermeneutics of vulnerability, Hammond reiterates that ethnography is about entanglement and proximity, about sex and power. Moving forward, or coming closer, into a queerer field and methodology thus necessitates: 1) that we understand ourselves as always being within webs of identity and power; 2) that we remember, following Wong, all music is made possible through erotics, and that both we and our interlocutors have sexual lives that manifest in fieldwork, and 3) that these things mean that we all have work to do on gender (on race, on ethnicity, on disability), that no project is free of these very material conditions of life and music-making.

Notes

1. The use of "transgendered" rather than "transgender" is offensive to most trans individuals, as it both 1) implies an act upon them rather than an identity, and 2) marks transgender identity as separate from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identities (one is not "gay-ed"). For additional information and resources, visit <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

2. Philip Brett is of course widely regarded as the key figure in queer musicology, beginning with his work on Benjamin Britten in the late 1970s/early 1980s. For a history of music and gender, particularly as it relates to European sexology and the nineteenth century, see Wood, Brett, and Hubbs, 2012.

3. The term "popular music" is highly contested and culturally contingent. Referring to popular music as a "common object" does not imply homogeneity, but rather an embrace of the heterogeneous yet interrelated genres, theories, and methodologies rooted beneath the field of popular music studies. See Holt, 2007 for more on genre, and Cohen, 1993 for the necessity of ethnographic methods in popular music studies.

4. Mason Stokes writes that “whiteness works best—in fact...it only works only—when it attaches itself to other abstractions, becoming yet another invisible strand in a larger web of unseen yet powerful cultural forces.” This is to say that when we focus on sexuality, we make visible its entire web of co-constitutive forces, particularly race. Discussing one necessitates the other. For more on whiteness and heterosexuality, see Whitney, 2017 and Yep, 2003.

5. In her book *The Conjectural Body: Gender, Race, and the Philosophy of Music*, Robin James labels the relationship between racialized/gendered bodies and sound as “coincident.” James asserts that previous metaphors for understand the race/gender/sound relationship—the language of “examples,” “traffic,” and “blending”—are inadequate because “[i]dentity categories always exist in combination, because they do not persist independently of the lived experiences of real, existent people” (2010, 21, emphasis in original). While race and gender require delineation and theorization as categories with their own epistemologies, “it is impossible to depict or analyze any identity category in isolation from all the others” (20).

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