

Queer Media Studies Futures
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Ben Aslinger, Bentley University

I offer this provocation (or polemic?) to highlight the radical diversity in queer media studies while addressing some of the personal concerns I have regarding the construction and dissemination of queer media studies work. An increasing array of queer media studies projects analyzing and interrogating digital media poetics, practices, and politics are emerging. And an increasing number of queer scholars are working outside what may at first glance be seen as “queer media studies” – scholars working on media industries, digital platforms, and science and technology studies. Work on queer industries and production cultures as well as work on queer audiences challenges us to acknowledge the methodological diversity and breadth of queer media studies and militates against reductive understandings of queer media studies as literary or filmic theorizing.

While I am interested in exploring, problematizing, and further elaborating the title question of David M. Halperin’s provocative book *What Do Gay Men Want?*, I recognize the tensions between particular identities and intersectionality in the shaping of queer work and the value attached to specific manifestations of queer scholarship. I firmly agree with the position that we cannot take queer as meaning simply the production of texts and cultural practices of gay men, but that does not mean that work on gay male particularities doesn’t have its place in queer or LGBTQ media studies. It means that we need to widen the range of particularities addressed in our scholarship, find new ways of using traditional and emerging forms of scholarly communication, and increase the popularity of collaborative projects (that are only now being given more credit in humanities scholarship) to talk within and across more and more particularities.

One of the complaints or problems John Hartley (and to an extent Graeme Turner) note in their recent provocations on the future of media and cultural studies is the way that a sense of an appropriate politics defines and limits both the objects of study and the interpretative schemas and methods used to explore and analyze them. Is it time that we move beyond (or perhaps bracket) the evaluative dimension of queer media studies to focus on the highly fraught processes of self-identification and deliberation in queer communities? Many pieces try to dismiss the positive-negative binary or attempt to move beyond adjudicating the “quality” of queer representations but end up unintentionally reinforcing the notion of appropriate representation, a notion that the very notion of “queer” seems to militate against.

On occasion at conferences, I see questioners challenging presenters to locate and define queerness. Questions of this type can seek to open up new queer possibilities and redefinitions of just what we mean by queer and to push presenters to refine their ideas of how queer theories and methodologies map onto the texts, practices, or phenomena in question. But what I see more often is a subtle dismissal of work or objects as not queer enough. I am concerned about the implicit and explicit politics of queer media studies scholarship (and the kinds of discussions scholarship creates within graduate and undergraduate classrooms and in the efforts of scholars to talk about queerness outside the academy) because I think that queer scholarship can (either fairly or unfairly) be seen as writing a prescription on how to be queer or can work to dismiss LGBTQ scholarly, creative, or social work for not being queer enough. This is particularly true if queerness is automatically or uncritically associated with a radical transgressivity. I’m not

particularly interested in queer transgressivity for the celebration of alterity; I'm more interested in queer health, queer flourishing, queer life, and queer happiness, regardless how they happen.

It is time, as Mary L. Gray argues so eloquently, to come to terms with some of the unwritten and implicit assumptions loaded into the vocabulary and terms we use to interrogate queer media such as heteronormative, homonormative, normativity, and transgressivity. A great many scholars, including Mary L. Gray and Karen Tongson, are moving us toward a much more multi-accentual theoretical account of queer subject formation and elaboration (in the critical, linguistic, and aural senses). Our valorization of particular moments in queer media history and our demonization of others demand reconsideration as we place local, national, translocal, and transnational audiences, industries, and production cultures in our analyses of textual and platform production and the resulting material and psychic effects of form/platform politics.

To conclude, I have (and I suspect a lot of us have) been wrestling with questions such as the following:

What are the affordances of digital technologies and platforms for queer media studies?

How do digital media platforms challenge us to develop new articulations of where we locate queerness and how we define it?

Do digital media experiences introduce a little chaos into our logics of determining and locating queerness?

How do identifications, representations, and creative practices evidence a complex range of attitudes, behaviors, performances, and desires that move back and forth over a continuum from normativity to transgressivity?