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Academically literate/Queerly literate

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This paper will outline how queer theory can inform academic literacies (AL) practice concerned with negotiating the inside/outside status of widening participation cohorts in university. In particular, it will consider the usefulness of some queer theory strategies for enabling non-traditional students without uncritically assimilating them in to dominant discourses. It outlines queer theory strategies of 'doubled vision', 'strategic essentialism', and 'analysis interminable' and demonstrates how these were operationalized in the design of an online academic literacies unit for social science students from diverse backgrounds. These non-assimilating, but simultaneously enabling, strategies are considered to be both ethically desirable and practically useful.

Key words: queer theory, academic literacies, widening participation, assimilation, critique.

1. Introduction

Queer theory's troubling of the exclusionary nature of dominant, essentialist identity can be related to being critical of and troubling the exclusionary nature of dominant conventions and discourses of the academy. Further, some strategies developed by queer theorists for negotiating the paradoxical position that one can only exist and be recognised by invoking essential identity can be allegorised to the similar bind in academia: that one must use the discourses of academia in order to succeed in it. Thus, the notion of insider/outsider subject positioning in identity invoked by queer theory can be allegorised to the teaching of academic literacies (AL) to understand a strategically useful and ethically desirable relationship of non-traditional students to academic knowledge and conventions. This informed the content and form decisions that I made in developing an online academic literacies unit with a high number of non-traditional students. Winans (2006) suggests that "queer pedagogy entails decentring dominant cultural assumptions" (p. 107) and that it is a useful perspective for teaching critical thinking. While most invocations of queer pedagogy have thus far done so to teach *about* sexual orientation in the classroom, Winans recommends extending the impulse of "queering" to deconstructing allegorical dominant discourses. Below I will therefore apply some of the thinking strategies developed by queer theory which I chart elsewhere (Nicholas, 2014) to a university unit not concerned with the subject matter of sexuality, in considering how students might take up the "double consciousness" (Wallace, 2002) identified as necessary for an enabling strategy that does not replicate the problems of the dominant discourse.

2. Queer theory

> Queer theory and pedagogy place at stake the desire to deconstruct binaries central to Western modes of meaning making, learning, teaching, and doing politics. Both desire to subvert the processes of normalization. (Luhmann, 1998, p. 128)

Queer theory is a deconstructive theory that problematises essentialised, fixed, binary gender and sexuality. That is, it challenges the idea that there is a true male/female gender or homo/hetero sexuality waiting to be expressed, and suggests that these constructs perpetuate hierarchy and exclusion. In its radical critique of identity, it suggests that identity that is taken to be essential is better understood as a reified doing, a verb rather than a noun. Key deconstructivist feminist Judith Butler characterises gender as a "repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body" (Butler, 2007, p. xv). Queer theory is, in my reading, a fundamentally ethical practice concerned with the social justice ideals of decentring the norm that renders some people 'queer' in relation to it. A key aspect of queer theory is exposing the normalising impulses inherent in dominant identities and how they are always normalised in contrast to a subjugated and queer 'other'. In particular, it is a procedural theory, a mode of thought concerned with an ongoing process of "queering" what is taken for granted, rather than a positive theory of how things *are*. 'Queer' is not an identity, then, but rather a perspective or mode of perception. This queer mode of perception "challenge[s] the pervasive and often invisible heteronormativity of modern societies" (Warner, 1991, p. 3). 'Heteronormativity' is a key term in queer theory, denoting the taken for granted way in which society perpetuates heterosexuality and the normative gender that it requires as normal and natural, and devalues what is not heterosexual. However, it is also concerned with critiquing the assimilationism and heteronormativity of mainstream gay and lesbian politics that seeks acceptance according to the values of dominant society. By its very nature, through applying deconstruction to selfhood, it inheres a normative premise that the self (especially the sexual self) should not be formed through this heteronormative "certain view of the world" (Spivak, 1976, p. xiii) which is "pervasive and often invisible" (Warner, 1991, p. 3). In its concern with dominant discourses and othering, my interest in queer theory stems from the same impulse as my interest in academic literacies and widening participation.

3. The unit and 'non-traditional' students

In the context of Australia's widening participation agenda for universities, and primarily as a gender and queer theorist, I was faced with the task of developing an online academic literacies unit for students across the social sciences, the majority of whom were going on to study psychology. The 2009 Australian government vision of more equitable access to higher education for previously underrepresented groups is explicitly underpinned by social justice principles, these being listed in the *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System* report as:

- the importance of opportunity for all, especially those from groups underrepresented in higher education;
- access to university based on merit, not ability to pay;
- academic freedom and autonomy; and
- research that advances knowledge and critical thinking. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 8)

These have translated into and overlap with institution-specific commitments, for example, Swinburne University of Technology (2010a, 2010b) articulates principles of "social inclusion", "widening participation" and "diversity".

Online study in Australia is particularly rich for "non-traditional" or "widening participation" students, in particular in terms of "first-in-the-family students" (Fleckhammer & Richardson, 2012; Gillard, 2009; Rissman, Carrington, & Bland, 2013, p. 1). AL practitioners and thinkers and sociologists of education have highlighted that this context presents particular pragmatic challenges for inducting students in to the specific discourses and practices of academia (Devlin & O'Shea, 2011; Keevers & Abuodha, 2012; Nakata, 2012). This may especially be the case for students who lack the cultural capital of, for example, other family members who understand the conventions of university. The demographic make-up of the respondents to (optional) research undertaken in this unit indicates consistency with wider online demographics in Australia (Stone, Hewitt, & Morelli, 2013, p. 2). In terms of educational background, only 27%

had completed high school, and 42% cited TAFE level as their highest educational qualification. Most interestingly in terms of the notions of social and cultural reproduction and capital, perhaps, only 14% stated that either of their parents had completed higher education.

Keevers and Abuodha (2012) argue that the Australian government's approach to widening participation has tended to over-emphasise "point of entry" and under-emphasise the "experience of under-represented groups in learning environments" (p. 43). This shifts most of the responsibility for adjustment and assimilation on to the non-traditional student (cf. Nakata, 2007), often leading to a sense of othering, and subsequent attrition and lack of success. This assimilationist approach can be allegorised to the politics of respectability often practiced by non-heterosexuals, what Duggan (2003) coined "homonormativity" to signify "a [gay] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions" (p. 50). Queer theorists and deconstructive feminists have critiqued the normalisation, restriction, exclusion and assimilation inherent to gay identity politics and corollary "gay rights" (Warner, 1991) and feminist woman-centred identity politics (Butler, 1990). Such an approach requires adaptation by non-heterosexuals and "let[s] everyone else off the hook" (Duggan, 1994, p. 6). Queer theory instead deconstructs this normalisation and celebrates this difference, this queerness.

With the non-traditional student in mind, and informed by my interest in queer theory, I made various ethical and pragmatic choices about the form and content of this unit in order to de-centre the normality of the academic conventions, and to try and minimise this sense of othering. A key aim was to develop a curriculum which engaged explicitly and also sought to tackle implicitly the mechanisms by which the paradigms of academia might work to perpetuate social privilege and how this might be challenged.

The aim of this unit has historically been to prepare students, enabling them to gain the skills and understanding required for the rest of their university study. As such, I chose to make it an introduction to university on both a form and content level. The unit is double-layered by having two 'topics' but using these topics to unpack the conventions by which they are formed. The first is the sociology of education and an exploration of how researchers have investigated the inequalities in university education in Australia among different demographics. This entails using topic-specific examples to complete small, incremental skills-based assessments (reading and note-taking, essay- and time-planning, and referencing and citing) and for this to feed in to an academic essay which makes an argument about the causes of one aspect of this inequality. The second half of the unit is based around the topic of interrogating 'knowledge': for example how it is made, how it gains value, how it varies across cultures. It is intended to emulate the standard conventions of university study by encouraging a more independent and peer-learning approach, but again has clear guidance for how to do this and also takes the time to unpack the assumptions and conventions within the academia engaged. I will elaborate on the specifics below. These choices were informed by ideas from queer theory and AL theory about the nature of knowledge, learning, and agency which I will detail below. This helped me to consider how a unit of study which is essentially intended to assimilate students into conventions could do so in a manner as enabling and transparent as possible.

3. Ontology: Subjectivation and discourses

Before moving on to detail some of the queer strategies I used for academic literacies, I will expand on the ontological assumptions and explications of queer theory/s (what they understand about the nature of being and identity). These ontological premises about the relationship between discourses and agency have informed my formulation of teaching strategies for fostering the ethos I have outlined. They have allowed me to produce a specific account of the limits and corollary possibilities for agency within the pre-existing discourses which form academia.

A central problem which queer theory presents for strategies for critiquing dominant discourses is that it posits them as inescapable and the only way that subjects can be intelligible, that is "the individual's 'subjectivity' is generated through the learning and use of certain discursive practices" (Davies & Harre, 2003, para 1). A favourite poststructuralist informed definition of

discourse which I use for my students is as follows: "A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e., a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (Hall, 1992, p. 201). Indeed, Butler outlines the bind that "we are constituted, invariably and from the start, by what is before us and outside of us" (Butler, 2004, p. 3). In the case of the identities that we must invoke to make sense in/of the world, this "discursively conditioned experience" is "always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (Butler, 1990, p. 9). Sharing similar ontological premises, the AL paradigm does not naturalise one discourse as universal and natural, but instead inheres in

> the assumption…that learning in higher education is a complex social and cognitive process of discovering and mastering – perhaps even contesting – the knowledge-making rules and practices, values and roles that characterize the disciplinary cultures of the various fields of study. (Warren, 2002, p. 87)

This premise that "speaking subjects are always the products of cultural and historical forces" (Wallace, 2002, p. 53) presents the paradoxical scene that we are both enabled and delimited by pre-existing discourses, be they those of identity or those of academia. The agency formulated by most queer theory does not allow for the political possibility of completely rejecting the discourses through which subjects become intelligible in society. However, it tends to acknowledge that this is the only site of agency, because "subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (Butler, 1997, p. 2). This means that the key to "agency" in queer ideas of subjectivity like Butler's (1990) notion of "performativity", outlined above, is that the discourses within which we are situated are not fixed and transcendental, but are being constantly reconstituted by participants and engaged with "in a living and reflective way" (Butler, 2005, p. 10). This is what Butler means when ze[1] posits identity as a doing not a being (again, a verb not a noun). It means that there is the possibility for "subversive practices [to]…challenge conventions of reading, and demand new possibilities of reading" (Butler, 1993, n.p.). This non-foundational characterisation of dominant discourses or norms de-naturalises what is taken to be fixed and offers the possibility that it may be otherwise.

The issue then becomes, how can we use these discourses or "conventions of reading" shaped by dominant forces, which indeed we must use, without reifying them? Applied directly to the problem of inducting students into academic discourses and conventions, how can we do so without subjugating other knowledges and discursive modes? Given this picture of agency and the queer project or impulse outlined above, queer's modest ethico-political aim can then be understood as "endeavour[ing]…to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relationship to them" [norms or discourses]" (Butler, 2004, p. 3). This is where pedagogical strategies and students' relationship with the academy becomes so important. Second, it informs my approach of presenting academia explicitly as a collection of discourses which are situated and produced by subjects who are in turn situated and produced by them. That is, of people and discourses as co-constitutive (Keevers & Aboudha, 2012).

Below I will outline some useful strategies that have been developed or engaged by queer theorists for just this purpose, for engaging norms and discourses while maintaining a critical relationship to them, and illustrate how I have applied them to my own teaching and course design.

4. Strategies for queer academic literacy

A queer strategy for teaching and learning entails thinking about the what *and* how. On the level of content, an easy strategy long employed by educators dedicated to social justice is "opening the classroom to multiple discourses, especially those that are often excluded" (Winans, 2006, p.

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[1] Please note that this is the use of gender-neutral pronouns, an act intended to foster deconstructive readings. This practice has precedents in my own work and elsewhere (Nicholas, in press; Wyss, 2004), and here I substitute 'ze' for she/he and 'per' for her/him.

119). It has been widely argued in feminist and indigenous epistemological theory that academic knowledge represents a particular dominant world-view (Shahjahan, 2005; Stanley, 2013; Stanley & Wise, 2002); thus I made the ethical decision that with the *overt* content of the unit I would seek to implement a more "culturally appropriate curriculum" (Nakata, 2012, p. 2). This would implicitly contextualise academic knowledge as only one mode of knowing among others to foster a critical relationship to what Havel calls the "arrogant absolutist reason" (Apfell-Marglin, 1996, p. 1) at the basis of scientistic "Western" knowledge and to not implicitly sideline "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980, p. 81). This is particularly pertinent in the Australian continent where this scientistic mode of understanding the world is relatively new, and universities purport widening participation strategies of "working with diverse communities and Indigenous Australians…from a base of respect for cultural knowledge and the opportunities for shared learning" (Swinburne University of Technology, 2010a, p. 11). Thus an aim of the content aspect of this unit is to demonstrate how the academic approach to knowledge may also exclude the "wealth of often precise and detailed verifiable knowledge" (Gostin & Chong, 2002, p. 136) which other ways of understanding the world may have to offer. This bears "family resemblances" (Keevers & Abuodha, 2012, p. 44) to approaches to social inclusion which are premised in recognition theories (that is, recognition of minority identity and culture) and seek to foster what Keevers and Abuodha (2012, p. 46), drawing on Dei, describe as "epistemological equity…creating inclusive spaces where multiple ways of knowing can flourish".

A second content-based strategy was the decision to provide students with the opportunity to interrogate and participate in the workings of two particular academic conversations which are pertinent to the very social justice ethos which in part informed the creation of this academic literacies-dedicated unit of study. Illustratively, the first topic – an exploration of divergent perspectives in academic research around why participation in university in contemporary Australia is unequal across different social groups – requires students to report on their academic findings according to the conventions of academic research. This takes heed of the advice that:

> An essential skill needed for integration and educational equity…is for academics to develop a positive classroom culture towards diversity and a willingness to engage in open discussions about difference. (Rissman et al., 2013, p. 2)

As well as creating more culturally diverse content, this also allows students to reflect on their own relationship to academia and to contextualise this within broader, more generalisable knowledge, allowing for reflection on the extent to which capacities for university study are contingent on socio-cultural context and are thus a "social and cognitive process of discovering and mastering" (Warren, 2002, p. 87). This de-mystifies and de-essentialises these capacities or competencies. This topic is intended to work in conjunction with the second academic conversation which is a presentation of academic perspectives explicitly around knowledge, and specifically the knowledge of social science: "how we come to know and how knowledge is produced" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 126). Together, they are intended to both engage students in something that is relevant and resonant, and more strategically to de-reify scientistic and academic knowledge and present them instead as particular and situated, and thus particular languages that can be mastered, as I will now discuss.

5. Queering AL: "Doubled vision", "scrupulous visibility", and "analysis interminable"

This diversification of content is well and good, but in order to serve the students' needs, it is important not to lose sight of the official function of the unit: that students need to be able to use the dominant discourses in order to succeed in academia. An important strategic concern is highlighted by Nakata (2012) in discussing attempts to foster social inclusion for Indigenous students in Australian university:

> Indigenous academics have been calling for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge into disciplines and courses. But that project also takes us away

from Indigenous students' academic under-preparation into another area and becomes more about changing the practices of the institution and their disciplines. (p. 3)

This is the more pragmatic and urgent need to "prepare" previously excluded students to succeed in university as it *is* because, as noted by deconstructionist thinkers, "the resources of metaphysical discourse are the only ones that are available, [thus] one must continue to use them even when trying to promote their displacement" (Critchley, 1999, p. 15). Likewise, queer pedagogues have noted that the aim of inclusive education is not fulfilled merely by addressing diversity in content and "adding-on" non-heterosexuality (Britzman, 1995).

This underpins the second strategy of "doubled vision" (de Lauretis, 1987), a double-layered approach of teaching students to use the requisite skills while concurrently having the critical capacity to relativise them. This has the double intention of both de-centering the authority of dominant modes (and thus attempts to avoid assimilation), and preparing students to engage them strategically to succeed. Nakata (2012, p. 2) reminds us that Indigenous centres in universities have been operationalising such a "multi-faceted" approach for many years. It is hoped that doing so in a relativistic context alongside other knowledges, as outlined above, will allow students to wield the conventions of academia, but in a critical manner. This means that concurrently there needs to be a process of "mak[ing] the tacit explicit" (Jacobs, 2007) and "teaching and learning about this partial nature of standards…teaching and learning that different perspectives and knowledges and skills can have different political implications" (Kumashiro, 2003, p. 365).

Notions and strategies of "positioning" developed by queer theorists for negotiating the similar ironic position of "using gender to undo gender" (Lorber, 2000) are fruitful here. Whilst explicitly critiquing assimilation into rigid and essentialist identity categories, as outlined above, a person needs to invoke these foundational identities so critiqued by queer theory in order even to be "intelligible" (Butler, 2007, p. 198). Indeed, the issue of being both inside and outside dominant positions was a preoccupation of much early queer theory (Sedgwick, 1990). The notion of "strategic essentialism" (Fuss, 1991) was developed to distinguish engagements with dominant subject positions that were critical from those that weren't. This strategic (as opposed to simply reified) taking up of a position, in this case of academic conventions, requires a critical relationship to the academy, if critique is understood in a Foucauldian double-layered sense of being "both partner and adversary" (Foucault, 2007, p. 44) to the dominant discourses of academia. The intention is for students genuinely to evaluate the discourses of the academy in their specific social and hierarchical context, while simultaneously engaging these discourses, to "work two knowledge systems together". (Nakata, 2012, p. 5)

The two topics outlined above (inequality in university and the diversity of knowledge systems) are intended to embody this double layering by presenting the very conventions that are required to succeed in university as the subject matter and by problematising or deconstructing them. By focusing on the conditions of constitution of these two academic conversations the intention is to reveal the almost limitless perspectives which can go in to an academic conversation, the processes and conventions through which researchers attempt to make their research robust and why some accounts or perspectives are considered more valid than others. The double layering of this is that both the content and the process is continually reflected on self-consciously in order that no aspect is naturalised as a truth claim or the right way, to the extent of being presented as the "certain view of the world [which is] the correct one" (Spivak, 1976, p. xiii). Conventions are instead made explicit such that they may be learned, but learned as one specific *paradigm* that strategically enables meaningful research and communication. Indeed, a complementary strategy to that of strategic essentialism is Spivak's (1994) notion that, when engaging unavoidably with power relations, like the discourses of the academy, what can distinguish positive, nonsubordinating, and "developmental" relations from engagements that uncritically replicate dominating relations, is engaging in them in a "scrupulously visible" (p. 153) manner. "Scrupulous visibility" is a strategy that may prevent, for example, "the dangers for Indigenous students of uncritical immersion in the knowledge, logic and practices of the disciplines" (Nakata 2012, p. 3) just as it was intended to prevent reification of and assimilation

into exclusionary identity categories for deconstructionist feminists. In terms of my unit, this means explicitly exploring "the interpretive frameworks" (Winans, 2006, p.119) which are the explicit content of the unit. In a foreword to Derrida's germinal deconstructivist text, *Of Grammatology*, postcolonial feminist thinker Spivak posited that deconstruction departs from recognising that

> …a certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been accepted as the correct one, and, if the minute particulars of that view are examined, a rather different picture…emerges. That examination involves an enquiry into the "operation" of our most familiar gestures. (Spivak, 1976, p. xiii)

In this spirit, paradigms are "deconstructed" and presented to students as modes of researching and communicating that can be taken up and used for particular purposes, just as queer thus became not an identity, but a "place or positionality" (Fuss, 1989, p. 29). Other paradigms of knowledge that are similarly strategically useful are presented, such as Indigenous knowledge about the environment which shares many characteristics with Western science, such as an origin in experiment, verifiability, and reliability (Gostin & Chong, 1994). Denaturalising and decentring the discourse of science and presenting it as one knowledge paradigm among many is intended to foster a kind of relativism to this, such that its authoritative power does not congeal. This is particularly a concern in psychology where the scientistic conventions are so stringent and often presented uncritically. Historicising science in this way is akin to the genealogical work of Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality*, for example, Foucault (1978) seeks to chart the historical specificity of our current mode of understanding ourselves through the lens of sexual identity in order to provoke a critical relation to this mode: "Since these things … have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was they were made" (Foucault, 1988, as cited in Cooper & Blair, 2002, p. 517). This undoing of reified norms in *The History of Sexuality* is often seen to be central to enabling queer theory (Jagose, 1998). Likewise, Butler (1990) extended this genealogical critique to gender in *Gender Trouble*, charting how it has come to be understood as a fixed and central component of the self.

The outcome of this second half of the unit that interrogates knowledge is a conventional university essay, adhering to the conventions students will need throughout their degree. The key intentions of this half of the unit, then, are for students to develop the ability to present work according to discipline-specific academic conventions and develop reasoning skills (reconstruction), but also reflect on a kind of relativism in their thinking before drawing qualified conclusions (deconstruction). This entails reflection on the truth claims in different fields, emphasising that in contemporary science it is assumed that:

> the so-called laws of nature which science discovers are not absolutely proven to hold: they are generalizations which have a high probability of being true. The more observations that we make confirming these laws, the more likely that they are true. (Warburton, 1994, p. 90)

This then allows us to go on to an exploration of "the scientific method" and specific ways in which observations have been shaped into generalisations. This element of the unit is itself framed by the germinal empirical study in *Laboratory Life*, wherein Latour and Woolgar (1979) brought (social) scientific methods to bear on science, in order to interrogate the ways in which scientists came to construct order out of chaos (Latour & Woolgar, 1979, p. 33). This germinal study in itself is an illustration of the strategic use of scientific methods in order to demonstrate some of the limits of these methods. They emphasise that "If sociology could not be applied in a thorough going way to scientific knowledge, it would mean that science could not scientifically know itself" (Bloor, 1976, as cited in Latour & Woolgar, 1979, p. 7). This study allows students to reflect on the unavoidable element of a "craft character" in science and academia (Latour & Woolgar, 1979, p. 29), that is the extent to which it is a creative pursuit rather than the discovery of a pre-existing "truth" and is informed by those doing the research. In extending this issue of truth claims, I present the students with qualitative research which explicitly interrogates the kinds of truth claims made by contemporary scientific and social scientific disciplines (Moore, 2002), in a study which investigated the language used to talk about

discipline-specific ideas in physics, economics and sociology text books. This research found that, in fact, physics, the most "hard" of the sciences investigated in this study, makes less strong truth claims than economics. The findings were that physics tended to talk about perspectives and theories more than laws and truths (Moore, 2002, p.354). As well as challenging common sense views about the nature of scientific claims, this explicit example helps students to be aware of and develop the discipline-specific language they will require to be successful in their different subject areas. This reflection fosters AL by allowing me to emphasise that, even when evidence has been drawn, in social science approaches, "judgments are likely to be carefully qualified so that they do not go beyond what the evidence actually shows" (Weiten, 2010, p. 39). Through this investigation of notions of knowledge and truth, students can critique the universality characteristic of positivism whilst developing the more qualified language of contemporary social science that they will need to use in their work.

This returns me to how this approach is not only deconstructive and informed by the critical context of queer theory, but is motivated by a reconstructive "widening participation" agenda. As well as challenging norms, it is informed by research demonstrating that purely assimilationist educational strategies that uncritically present the "right way" are widely held to be less effective and to perpetuate disadvantage (De Plevitz, 2007; Singh, 2001). This critical strategy is not intended to entirely undermine these conventions that students will need to use, then, but to explicate them and make them visible such that students have an understanding of *why* they are so and be better equipped to engage them, revealing the ambiguous nature of the "unavoidable usefulness of something that is very dangerous" (Spivak, 1994, p. 156). An example used to illustrate this to students is an investigation into the political usefulness of academic, scientific research around climate change which is critically contrasted with journalistic writing on the same topic. This allows for explicit discussion around peer review and its usefulness, as well as possible risks. This emphasis on the usefulness of academic knowledge alongside attempts to diversify its content reflects Nakata's (2012) dual strategy of both:

- challenging students to change in order to master the knowledge, discourses and literacies of the university; and
- challenging universities to change some of their teaching and learning practices to promote the inclusion of the social realities and experiences of low SES students, of all kinds, so that they come to an understanding of the usefulness and utility of knowledge generation by thinkers such as themselves. (p. 3)

In contrast to the climate change conversation, a useful conversation from the discipline of psychology which can be collectively interrogated for these purposes of uncovering power and authority as well as utility in academic research, is that of the correlation hypothesised and investigated in psychology between violence and violent video games (Jones, 2002). This allows students to reflect simultaneously on the pragmatic use of social science research while also seeing the danger and power of preconceptions and reification, and of academic consensus. This particular topic allows students to be inducted into many of the conventions and institutions of this specific discipline or "genre" (Moore & Morton, 2005), by engaging with empirical quantitative research from the field which draw divergent or opposing conclusions, alongside popular discourse such as the genre of journalism, and more discipline specific genres such as press releases and statements from the American Psychological Association. This again fosters a relativism by illustrating the possibility of co-existing perspectives, as well as an interrogation of the characteristics and value of the particular types of reasoning and evidence in this discipline, and the pragmatic impacts of different conclusions.

It is not lost on me that such principles of ongoing contestation and the notion of an openness to having preconceived ideas superseded are those which explicitly underpin the *ideal* model of the "scientific method", and this example of psychology's long and shifting engagement with the issue of violence and violent video games illustrates this quite exceptionally. This particular academic conversation is the archetypal example of the circular process of reconstruction and deconstruction. Having to some extent "deconstructed" some aspects of the scientific and academic conventions underpinning it, we return to a discussion of their strategic usefulness so

that, in addition to fostering what I consider a healthy scepticism of universalising truth claims, students can consider how this topic, like that of climate change, is also strategically useful for challenging dominant or dangerous ideologies. This demonstrates that such an approach, like the "queering" impulse or mode of thought that exemplifies queer theory, should be inexhaustible:

> If ideas and accepted practices have a way of hardening, of rigidifying over time, then criticism must not be an isolated event but an ongoing practice. If thinking differently, seeking freedom by creative engagement with new possibilities, is the objective, then there is no end to ethical criticism. (Cooper & Blair, 2002, p. 529)

In this way, queer theory has been mostly rejected as a term by its early proponents for not being able to sustain its own anti-normalising impulses (Giffney, 2004) and itself reifying in to an identity. Emblematically, Judith Butler found that any attempt to illustrate per theory with examples of practices that subvert the normative constitution of gender or demonstrate "performativity" resulted in the canonisation of these examples as programmatic prescriptions of how to "do" queer or non-heteronormative gender correctly (Butler, 1993). In a later book, *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) addresses the ways that the germinal *Gender Trouble* was understood, and states that "by citing drag as an example of performativity...[it] was taken then, by some, to be *exemplary* of performativity" (p. 230). Likewise, Butler also addresses the way that "queer" has become an identity or a noun, so that queer is taken to be a subject position that one can *become* rather than a strategic act or something that is *done*. For Butler, then, queer must remain a verb, an act of de-normalising, and never congeal into a noun.

In this way, a truly enabling and socially inclusive approach to academic literacies education should, ideally, enable students but retain an element of "'analysis interminable,' [which entails] a responsibility to exert sustained pressure from/on the margins" (Fuss, 1991, p. 6). In theory, this would both minimise exclusion of non-traditional groups, and, in the spirit of the "scientific method" would allow knowledge to evolve and be ever more useful, and prevent it from congealing into ideological dominance. It is my hope, then, that by interrogating academia in this way, this unit is able to make academia appear less 'alien' to students and to help them feel enabled to use its conventions.

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