Lessons from The Leather Archives and Museum
On The Promises of BDSM

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> We cannot make or force our students to expose themselves to what is other and different and strange. The only thing we can do is to make sure that there are at least opportunities within education to meet and encounter what is different, strange, and other, and also that there are opportunities for our students to really respond, to find their own voice, their own way of speaking.
> (Biesta, 2005, p. 6)

I STAND AT THE PODIUM IN THE SMALL THEATRE at the start of the museum tour for the Leather Archives and Museum (LA&M). Surrounded by iconic images from gay artist Etienne – images of sado–masochistic sexual practices between men – I make a joke about phallic knowledge and size. We all giggle nervously. Etienne, like Tom of Finland, painted in a stylized and rather exaggerated, though highly erotic, fashion. The pieces – all from historic leather bars that existed at various times in Chicago, Illinois – illustrate, quite literally, sexual subjects subjecting themselves and being subjected to any number of (fantastical) sexual practices. These are the images that surround us – a Master's level class in Social Theory for Artists and Cultural Workers – as we begin our lessons on sexuality, sex, and the "art of cruelty". [1] They represent not only sexual practices, but also the (sexual) history of the city we all call home.

Yet, this art of cruelty is not to be understood as mere "cruelty". Rather, in combination with Maggie Nelson's (2011) book aptly titled *The Art Of Cruelty,* it is to be seen as an artistic intervention in thinking sex, sexuality, and the erotic in ways that challenge propriety and the status quo. The pedagogical promise of such an experience for the students and me is a promise of unknown consequences. I did not create a lesson plan, a list of things to "do" or "think," in the hopes that such an opportunity would allow us to respond and relate to such material in any

number of ways. The promise is open–ended offering the space and time to bring up diverse feelings and thoughts. The class tour is perhaps a performance of masochism – to experience the awkward pains of being subjected to such queer content with the promise of pleasure emerging from and through such pain. This tour is, for me in fact, an experiment. I want to see if it is possible to take education students to a museum such as the LA&M to "do" queer theory in education rather than merely read about it or stay within the traditional bounds of sexuality talk in education. This is my own attempt, following David Halperin, to "find ways of renewing its [queer theory's] radical potential [by] reinventing its capacity to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought" (2003, p. 343).

As I look from the podium I sense excitement and perhaps a bit of nervousness from students about the tour we are about to begin. Surrounded by sexual images and about to tour a museum most of them did not know existed, I as "teacher" am unsure what will come of such an experience; an experience of exploring a museum that is devoted to documenting and archiving sexual cultures, particularly sado–masochistic, fetish, and leather communities. Though we have read Maggie Nelson's book that reckoned with cruelty in art – which I hope allowed them to read the images in the museum in a more critical and just manner – I worry that our visit might merely exoticize sexual subcultures. Yet, students will be reading Tim Dean's (2009) controversial *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* next week so my hope is that in potentially exoticizing a sexual culture for a moment, students will move beyond being preoccupied by exotic sexual subcultures and start to have their thoughts occupied by how sexualities offer different ways of engaging the self, the other, and knowledge. My concern is how might such a combination of texts and this tour allow us to see the techniques, practices, and policies that impact how sex and sexuality operate? And how might this constellation of experiences illuminate institutional preoccupations with sex that often-go unseen?[2] Basically, how can sex and sexuality become a lens through which we see the world? I quickly make some perfunctory remarks – foreplay perhaps – about the plan for the evening before introducing our docent who is fielding questions and discussing various components of the museum, its history, and its role within the local, national, and international Leather and BDSM scene.

For the present project I think through the possibilities and challenges of engaging the space and time of the LA&M for what it offers in thinking about doing justice to sexuality, sex, and sexual subjects outside the frame of education curricula that, if they address issues of so-called alternative sexualities, often only focus on gay and lesbian students. This will entail an engagement with queer ethics and a turn to see what BDSM offers the pedagogical scene of education, including teacher education.[3] What, I will ask, might it mean to think about and through education with queer sexual subcultures as our teachers? What lessons might the Leather and BDSM communities offer teacher–educators not simply about sexuality or sex, but also about teacher practices and cultivating sensibilities toward the other?

A Museum Introduction

The Leather Archives and Museum (LA&M) sits on a quiet street in a northern neighborhood of Chicago. Nestled on a non–descript street in an imposing building, the outside tells nothing about what lies behind the locked doors. From the street, one only sees "LA&M" in stark black letters against blonde bricks. At the front door we read a sign explaining what lies behind the locked doors and get an initial glimpse at the ways sexuality and sexual content are

disciplined differently than other content. While museum visits and tours are quite common in education, this visit begins differently as we cannot simply walk into the museum, but are forewarned about what we are entering. As we individually stand at the locked front doors waiting to be greeted and let in by our docent, we each perhaps glance over our shoulders to see if others are watching while pondering what it is that we are getting ourselves into by having rung the bell.

According to the LA&M website

> The Leather Archives & Museum is a library, museum and archives pertaining to Leather, fetishism, sadomasochism, and alternative sexual practices. The geographic collection scope is worldwide and includes all sexual orientations and genders. The library collection contains published books, magazines, scholarly publications, films and electronic resources related to the subject matter. The museum collection contains original erotic art and artifacts from alternative sex organizations and individuals. The archival collection contains unpublished papers and records from notable activists, artists, businesses and organizations related to the subject matter (LA&M Website, n.d.)

Similar to any museum, the LA&M preserves objects, materials, and ideas. These things are donated to the institution by community members, left by estates, or acquired in other ways. As a community–based museum it is accountable to its members and engages, in its curated spaces, the debates that exist within the Leather and BDSM communities.

LA&M is not simply a museum to display art, but a space that seeks to preserve and archive artifacts from sexual subcultures rarely (re)presented within collections at more recognized museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Field Museum where my students and I also visited in the course of the semester. The images, videos, memorabilia, and lessons that are given in the museum are quite diverse and seemingly less sterile than those in more traditional museum spaces. From a dungeon room with a leather sling surrounded by various sex toys constructed from different materials to histories of Japanese Rope Bondage and a room devoted to Leather Women complete with lesbian porn playing, the museum shows and tells the histories and stories of sexual populations. And without such a space such histories and stories would probably only exist in private playrooms and backrooms of bars inaccessible to a curious passerby and general public. Arguably, LA&M physicalizes Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) insight that "in insisting on the value of apparently marginal or ephemeral materials, the collectors of gay and lesbian archives propose that affects – associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma – make a document significant" (244). And LA&M makes the everyday objects of sexual subcultures – often pathologized in any number of ways – significant and important for our collective history.

Museum tours as an educational endeavor are, of course, nothing new. The history of museums and the idea(s) that found the museum are fraught with ideas about civilizing, exoticizing, and educating about the other (Willinsky, 2000). Yet, museums and art in general can and have been put to use in justice projects (Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt, 2012). The museum – a problematic monolithic term – can be occupied and engaged in any number of ways from being a form of "edutainment," a boring field trip, to a critical engagement with the space, representation, and history. Since the Leather Archives and Museum was a new space for us to experience, it offered a challenge to thinking about critiques of museums while also engaging

new, queer content. The visit allowed us to think about the act of conservation in a museum while also engaging a diverse array of content that has the potential to scandalize. Additionally, unlike other museums we visited, the Leather Archives and Museum is a space designed and developed from below. It was and continues to be maintained by those within the sexual subcultures it represents. It exists in a different cultural dynamic than the more "prestigious" and "recognized" museums performing its subcultural status by being "under" the mainstream cultural radar.

Willinsky (2000) convincingly illuminates the history of the museum and its contribution to dividing the world. History is not static and museums themselves have – perhaps slowly – changed with criticism lodged against them.[4] Additionally, alternative museums like LA&M have emerged that "do" museums, I would argue, slightly differently – putting forth ideas about culture from within such cultures while recognizing the possibility (inevitability) of excluding due to space and access to materials. While access to the LA&M's content is a bit different than access to content at mainstream museums like the Art Institute of Chicago, such differences illuminate the politics of sexual representation. This is seen by the restrictions put on entry to those over the age of eighteen and in the need to be let into the museum after ringing a doorbell. Both of these restrictions highlight at the outset the ways content engaging sex, sexuality, and alternative sexual populations is policed and access to such content is made more complicated than access to other more "mainstream" content. Despite this, LA&M exists within a cultural milieu that utilizes such a space to conserve and archive the past and present in ways that appear less museum–like and more homegrown. Such a space is always under construction as new exhibits are created and old exhibits removed illustrating the ever–changing possibilities of representing sexual subcultures while still operating within the restrictive environment.

On BDSM – A Problematic Primer

BDSM and Leather Communities are, of course, quite diverse and have experienced their own history of controversy seen notably in the arguments within/between feminist communities.[5] The arguments hinge in large part on the ways S/M relationships are read as either maintaining patriarchal relations between participants or as disrupting patriarchal relations by eroticizing them for pleasurable ends. BDSM as a broad constellation of sexual practices that hinge on the relationship between pleasure and pain disrupt an emphasis on sexual identity by placing emphasis on the experiences meted out in, what is often referred to as, a scene. What this means is that BDSM is less concerned about the "who" in the scene and more interested in the "what" is being practiced. In the rather confusing terrain of identity politics then, BDSM's focus on practices offers examples of operating outside of the hetero-homo binary.

One of the lessons LA&M teaches at the basic level confirms Eve Sedgwick's first axiom that "people are different from each other" (1990, p. 22). The queerness of the content in LA&M – in relation to the quite conservative and normative ways sexuality is discussed in education – exposes the messiness, the diversity, and complexity of sex, sexuality, and sexual subjection. The space illustrates what it meant for queer to refer to " the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8). The differences documented in the exhibits illustrate that "in all sexualities, there is a range of how people act toward one another" (Rubin, 2011, p. 127).

And this is always tied up with power with S/M highlighting strategic relations that eroticize power but in a fluid manner (Foucault, 1998b). S/M, according to Foucault, is not a practice that uncovers unconscious desires, but "is much more than that; its the real creation of new possibilities of pleasure" (1998a, p. 165). And these new possibilities point toward new creations of relationships and pleasures that might be invented between bodies while simultaneously exposing the impoverished ideas of relating in contemporary times often narrowed down to the hetero/homo binary. LA&M through its exhibitions allows us – my students and I along with you the reader – to see the relational and ethical possibilities that become possible by thinking with and through bodily pleasures. The museum's objects and artifacts provide lessons about relating to the self, the other, the body, and pleasure in ways often unseen in mainstream museums and representations of sexuality.

Queer Ethics in Education

"The younger one is" Gayle Rubin writes, "the harder it is to access information about sex. The systematic restraints on curiosity about sex maintain sexual ignorance, and where people are ignorant they are manipulable" (2011a, p. 125). People across the political spectrum have for some time called sex education within the United States abysmal for various reasons. Attempts and arguments to create comprehensive sex education or persistent calls for abstinence-only sex education dominate thinking. "Yet," Casemore argues, "however comprehensive the knowledge, no sex education curriculum totalizes the conditions and experiences of sexual being that it provokes. Coming to understand one's own sexuality is an eternally incomplete subjective process" (2012, p. 321–322). Knowledge is not the cure and no one approach the best. Even as gay and lesbian students find more acceptance within the halls of schools and seeing, in some places, inclusion such inclusion, following Bingham and Biesta's reading of Jacques Rancière, should be questioned (2010). Inclusion comes at a cost.

Gay and lesbian students have seen legislative battles won that grant them legal protection, recognition, and equality yet such gains come at a price that maintains a particular regime of the normal or an entry into a particular police order (Rancière, 2004). Additionally, those institutions that have and continue to violate non–normative subjects have provided such gains. As Dean Spade argues in *Normal Life*

> the paths to equality laid out by the 'successful' lesbian and gay rights model to which we are assumed to aspire have little to offer us in terms of concrete change to our life chances; what they offer instead is the legitimization and expansion of systems that are killing us (2011, p. 41).

If we live in neoliberal times as so many say we do and are occupied by hetero and homo–normative ideas about life that fail to offer changes in queer "life chances", queer theory asks that we find ways to resist, subvert, transgress, or challenge such ideas to make alternatives possible – to make the "unthinkable", thinkable and redistribute the sensible. If students grow up in such an environment and some of those students become teachers then teacher education, perhaps, has a responsibility to engage (sex) education – broadly construed – in a way that disrupts this passion for inclusion and ruse of neoliberalism to introduce different passions for students and teachers to encounter. This is not, in my view, an epistemological responsibility

since knowledge is ubiquitous. Students can go online and learn all kinds of things that may or may not be deemed "appropriate" by the adults. Rather, this is an ethical responsibility that engages the question of relationality. How might students relate to one another and to knowledge they encounter in all the diverse environments they encounter? Might the ethics of queer life provide insights in the ethics of such encounters that challenge the neoliberalism and normative drives of contemporary society that influence education?

Michael Warner (1999) in *The Trouble with Normal* provides perhaps one of the best and most challenging engagements on the ethics of queer life that counters the demands for respectability and recognition seen in mainstream or what Dean calls "successful" Gay and Lesbian politics. Queer cultures, Warner argues, "have been freed from any attempt at respectability or dignity" (1999, p. 34). They are cultures where "everyone's a bottom, everyone's a slut, anyone who denies it is sure to meet justice at the hands of a bitter shady queen" (p. 34). Justice is meted out by the abject shady queen. And as Warner continues:

> In those circles where queerness has been most cultivated, the ground rule is that one doesn't pretend to be *above* the indignity of sex. And although this isn't announced as an ethical vision, that what it perversely is...Sex is understood to be as various as the people who have it. It is not required to be tidy, normal, uniform, or authorized by the government. (p. 35).

This queer culture is built on a premise that queerness offers a "special kind of sociability that holds queer culture together" that "begins in acknowledgement of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself". For Warner, "shame is bedrock" in the ethics of queer life. "Queers can be abusive, insulting, and vile toward one another" he writes "but because abjection is understood to be a shared condition, they also know how to communicate through such camaraderie a moving and unexpected form of generosity" (p. 35). The lessons of sociability and relationality – the ethics of queer life – are given by "the people you think are beneath you" (p. 35).

Learning from below, as in, listening to those one thinks are "beneath" the self, is perhaps one of the lessons that queer theory offers education and a lesson that it still rarely engages. Yet, when education engages sexuality, more often it engages the more reputable issues advocated for by mainstream organizations like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Gay, Lesbian, Education, Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Rarely are perverse queer figures held up as anything other than what one should not become or what once were the only options for the "sad lonely queers" before progress in LGBT rights.[6] Such figures far from exposing individual pathology, expose the normative ideas and techniques that exist. As Randall Halle aptly argued queers are defined by "not the acts in which they engage but rather the coercive norms that place their desires into a position of conflict with the present order" (2004, p. 117).

It is, as such, by touring a museum of "pathologized" or "queer" sexual subjects and subcultures that the very real possibility such lessons offer are allowed to be given and taken up by students in any number of ways. We – the students and I – were confronted with an interdisciplinary mix of lessons. From an introductory video explaining the history and purposes of the museum, along with some introductory lessons on BDSM to the library filled with books and magazines that document the fictions and realities of queer sexualities, we concretely encountered queerness on its own turf. The lessons the museum and our visit provided is a move away from, although not denial of, thinking sex in terms of acts, but thinking sex within the techniques and norms within the current social order. These sexualized objects and the spaces

they occupy provided an alternative education that might have allowed us to do justice to the ever–fluid queerness of the world. By occupying the space of such a museum our minds were allowed to occupy queer spaces, ideas, and passions that encounter difference differently and initiate students into the possibilities of alternative models of relating to the self, others, and the body.

BDSM in Education

It is rather rare to read about leather, BDSM, or the possibilities of such practices within education scholarship. Yet, every so often I come across such references. William Pinar in his introduction to *Queer Theory in Education* (1998) explains the intention of the collection – often seen as the first collection for queer thought in education – as simply (although complexly) to heighten the visibility of issues related to homophobia and heterosexism. The authors of the chapters, according to Pinar's introduction, wrote "in memory of those who have been murdered and beaten in gay bashings, those exterminated in the Holocaust, those who struggle(d) to survive in families whose 'values' justify sadism, for all those who have died of and are living with AIDS, you are with us here" (p. 2). I do not contest the need to heighten visibility of issues such as the violence and struggles faced by sexual minorities. The truth of the matter is that heterosexism, homophobia, and the new homonormativity continue to impact the lives of "queer" people. However, what I find curious is the linking of "sadism" to homophobic familial violence in part, because such a linking fails, as Warner sought, to engage the ethics of such a queer sexual practice. It buys into the mainstream view of sadism as a pathology.

Sadism is, according to the DSM IV–TR – the authoritative manual of psychological illness – a sexual pathology. Like homosexuality once was, sadism still is, as Gayle Rubin wrote, "quite firmly entrenched as psychological malfunction" (2011b, p. 150). Unlike homosexuality, sadism continues to exist as a psychological illness and in this rather minor moment in one of the first "queer" books in education, sadism is called upon to illuminate the need for a queer intervention. Family "values" that cause suffering through verbal and physical abuse; being kicked out of the house; and feelings of inadequacy are ironically labeled with another psycho–sexual malfunctioning – that of sadism. Sadism is the boogey–man – linked to the Holocaust, to gay bashing, familial intolerance, and HIV/AIDS – and pathologized, in an attempt to "clear space" so queers (although clearly not all queers) can speak. While space needs to be cleared for gays and lesbians to speak, sadists who practice "sadism" then in Pinar and still today remain part of the problem for their "sadism" is still a psychological malfunction.

Rubin in "Thinking Sex" writes that there have been shifts in the respectability of some sexual behavior – including "some forms of homosexuality" (2011b). Yet she continues to note "most homosexuality is still on the bad side of the line...Promiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transexuality, and cross–generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence" (p. 154). While originally published in the 1980's, not much has changed since Rubin's writing. Scholars of sexuality and education have, of course since the 1980's, drawn attention to the state of gay youth and sought ways to make spaces "safe", along with developed ways of thinking and talking about "queer youth".[7] I am interested in shifting focus to thinking through non–normative sexualities to explore what a particular "queer" sexuality – mainly BDSM – offers in how education functions in thinking through sexuality. As gay–straight

alliances become a norm in high schools, representations of gay youth and gay couples become accepted on T.V. – such that we see the emergence of a show entitled *The New Normal* that portrays quite spectacularly the "new homonormativity", it would seem that educational scholarship on sexuality has achieved in some sense success at making issues of heterosexism and homophobia visible. I do not want to negate the work that still needs to be done, rather I push the promises of sexuality in education to occupy a different physical (LA&M) and conceptual (BDSM) space to see what comes of it.

"The time has come to think about sex" Rubin argued years ago, but we perhaps must now recognize that we must not only think *about sex* but think *through sex* or more specifically for this argument, BDSM (2011b). E. L. McCallum in her feminist re–reading of fetishism makes a case for such thinking. Her re–readings of fetishism – her "object lessons" – are "a serious effort not just to think *about* fetishism, but more importantly to think *through* fetishism, using it as a strategic perspective for analyzing assumptions about subjects and objects, desire and knowledge, identity and difference" (1999, p. xv). Like fetishism, BDSM practices are much–maligned sexual perversions. Sadism is often tied to human's cruelty to the other, a violation of the other for one's own (sexual) gratification. Masochism tied to the pleasures in pain, a violation of one's self by an other for one's own (sexual) gratification. Yet, such practices offer a critical perspective on thinking through relationality and the challenges of relating to the self, the other, and knowledge. They offer, to copy McCallum, "strategic perspective" for engaging assumptions made about bodies, pleasure and pain, and the pedagogic scene. And our visit to the LA&M, allows me now – after the fact – to look back and think through the possibilities of giving such lessons.

Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish (1998) note

> To give someone a lesson is to teach but it is also (idiomatically) to punish: how this opens onto fields of undecidability – of initiation (training or education, indoctrination or enlightenment), of discipline (behavioral or academic), or responsibility (conformity or freedom) – in which any conscientious teacher must determine her practice! (p. 88)

To determine one's practice as a teacher relies on the options available – what is "thinkable" in pedagogic practice. The ways one practices teaching – giving lessons – occupies much of the time pre–service student–teachers have in their programs seen in the various methods courses and demands for practical application of material. A quick glance at the history and present of gay teachers specifically shows the precarious place of the sexual other. The homophobic fear of what might happen if gay teachers "initiate" youth – the fear that such initiation would lead youth into the homosexual lifestyle – is seemingly never far from the surface of conservative right fears that still exist regarding the issue of homosexuality in education.[8] Of course, not far from the liberal, counter–argument, we see the disavowal that gay teachers are different. Instead, to quote Lady Gaga, gays are "born that way" and homosexuality is not a choice into which one can be initiated. Gay teachers, the liberal argument goes, would not educate differently. They would in fact educate in much the same way – maintaining the status quo with the minor addition of making "gay" normal and tolerable.

However, the teachers (objects) exhibited at the Leather Archives and Museum along with the queer authors read in class illuminate what it might mean to, in education, not disavow the potential of "gay" initiation. Following the work of Foucault, homosexuality becomes not

about an identity, an in–born, transcendental identity but an invention, a becoming much like S/M. As Foucault writes in "Friendship as a Way of Life" "perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, 'what relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated'?" For Foucault, "the problem is not to discover oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships" (p. 135). LA&M showed – visually – the types of relationships that can exist between people and objects using sexuality as the lens. On one level it shows a type of intimacy in a non–pathologized way. But, on a different level it illustrates a way to think about how teachers and students can relate to one another. Teachers initiated into teaching through a multiplicity of ways are allowed to see the pedagogical scene similar to a BDSM scene where issues of power, difference, and roles are challenged and disrupted in a performative, pleasurable sense. Punishment, for example, has a pleasurable purpose in BDSM, but understanding such lines takes time and effort since punishment is more often associated with the infliction of pain for purposes other than pleasure (e.g., frustration, anger). And, as Blake, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish noted above giving a lesson is also about giving punishment. Yet, such punishment can be dealt and seen in a different light if the initiation into punishment and how it is "meted out" is, well, queered through the lens of BDSM.

Such ideas might seem quite strange and impossible. Yet

> What matters is not the content of what we say, but what is *done*. And what is done, what needs to be done, and what only I can do, is to respond to the stranger, to be *responsive* and *responsible* to what the stranger asks of me. (Biesta, 2005, p. 64).

While Pinar utilizes sadism as a concept illustrating violence against the other, sadism within the BDSM community illustrates possible pleasures. As a queer scholar, I have been and continue to be befuddled by the possibility of bringing pleasure to the classroom while being responsible to not only queer survival but also queer thrival. The gay and lesbian student has become rather normal due to the last twenty years of advocacy and political battles. The gay and lesbian student has, in some regards, been taken into the fold of neoliberal tolerance. There is much still to do of course, particularly around issues of bisexuality and transgender students. But education's responsibility must be one that engages the strangers that are to be met, there, in the unknown future recognizing the need to be careful in not using another (sexual) subculture as the scapegoat. As Tim Dean writes

> Thinking about sex in ethical terms requires some tolerance for boundary insecurity – tolerance, that is, for uncertainty about one's position relative to disturbing graphic material...Opening one's mind to ideas, images, and scenarios that seem rebarbative enlarges one's mental capacity in a way that suggests some interdependence between sexual ethics and intellectual ethics, or between erotic permissiveness and the liberty to think (2009, p. 28).

This responsibility is not something that knowledge can cure – that new content can be written and brought into the fold of transmissible knowledge – but rather ethical sensibilities seemingly need to be invented and felt toward constantly messing up the boundaries.

Concluding Thoughts

Taking students to museums is, as I have noted, nothing new particularly at an art school. Taking students to the Leather Archives and Museum while perhaps strange because of the content has the potential of becoming part of the curriculum. Such a curriculum may for some seem controversial or radical while others will see it as banal or trying too hard. The objects in LA&M have, like other museums, been removed from their original spaces (Leather Bars, private playrooms) and become objects of the museumgoer's gaze. They have become objects of knowledge, made special by being placed in a museum. Yet, there is, I believe, something to going to such a space in that it did allow my students and me to occupy the familiar space of a "museum", albeit a space filled with queer content. The stories documented and objects preserved (conserved), alongside the histories related to sexual subcultures that would otherwise be lost become visible. In the final time our class had at LA&M we sat in groups discussing the content of the museum, our experiences with the content, and the readings we did for the week. We were preoccupied by the lessons of the museum and the accompanying texts while grappling with our own history with sex, sexuality, and becoming sexual subjects. It was a brief time, but a time where we sat surrounded by hyper–stylized paintings of men by an artist himself preoccupied by homoeroticism and BDSM. We sat there discussing, enthralled by the diversity of ideas and practices that a short time before were unthinkable or unknown to us. And in this started to glimpse the possibilities that open up when thinking through BDSM.

My own preoccupation with sex and sexuality is, of course, nothing new. Others have engaged the (im)possiblity of merging queer theory with education. Foucault stated in *Talk Show* that it is quite an achievement that learning has been made to be so dull, when the first lesson we should learn, "if it makes any sense to learn such a thing" is that "learning is profoundly bound up with pleasure" (1996, p. 135–136). To do so, he asked that we "imagine what it would be like if people were crazy about learning the way they are about sex" (p. 136). I am not convinced that we were able to adequately imagine what learning in such a dynamic would be or what it would look like through our lessons at the LA&M. I myself in trying to create an opportunity to think through such a possibility most likely failed reproducing a traditional museum visit engaging queer subject matter. Such subjects matter though. As subjects often framed out of the educational landscape they offer an opportunity to re–frame education to look and perhaps be practiced differently. They offer lessons about relating to the body. Lessons from LA&M and BDSM are ones that eschew identity politics in favor of "inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body – through the eroticization of the body" that "has as one of its main features...the desexualization of pleasure" (Foucault, 1998b, p. 165). LA&M and BDSM move us away from thinking sex and desire to thinking through pleasures and our "strategic situation toward each other" (p. 167). These are practices that are not knowledge–focused (although they require knowledge for safety purposes) but relational. LA&M existing outside of the school provided opportunities for my students and me to meet surrounded by illustrations, paintings, photographs, and videos illustrating, portraying ways of relating to the self, the other, and pleasure. To end where I began

> We cannot make or force our students to expose themselves to what is other and different and strange. The only thing we can do is to make sure that there are at least opportunities within education to meet and encounter what is different,

> strange, and other, and also that there are opportunities for our students to really respond, to find their own voice, their own way of speaking. (Biesta, 2005, p. 6)

Our lessons from LA&M are as with any lesson multifaceted, diverse, and timely. But the hope is that such lessons created the opportunities that allowed for an encounter with strange ideas, images, languages, and ways of relating that might reframe education and the practices of teachers ever so slightly to allow not only for queer educational scholarship to be occupied by survival, but also become preoccupied with the thrival of queerness.

Notes

[1] My special thanks to Joshua Derbas, Jennifer Thomas, and Joslyn Winkler who were students that took part in this visit for their willingness to comment on drafts of this paper providing me with insights, critiques, and support to think through the issues that the museum visit, readings, and course provided in thinking about any number of issues addressed in this article. As their teacher, I am humbled by the intelligent and kind help they provided amidst their own busy schedules.

[2] Student feedback from the class in course evaluations and during the writing of this paper with student input did point to an ease emerging after the constellation of texts and museum visit to thinking about and through sexuality. One student noted her continued exploration of these issues, including a visit to the International Rubber Festival held in Chicago.

[3] BDSM refers to a constellation of sexual practices – Bondage, Domination, Sadism, and Masochism. These practices are understood in a variety of ways that are unique to a given space and time. Due to space constraints I will refer to BDSM without separating out the distinctions that exist, leaving it to the reader to explore the distinctions between B/D/S/M.

[4] This was a lesson made visible to us at our visit to the Field Museum where our docent discussed the evolving relationship between the Field Museum and various Native Tribes regarding the presentation of artifacts.

[5] See Samois's collection *Coming to Power* and Linden, Pagano, Russell & Star's *Against Sadomasochism*

[6] See Ann Cvetkovich (2003) *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* & Heather Love (2009) *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* for examples of work that explores alternative queer histories.

[7] See Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt (2004); Rodriguez & Pinar (2007); Rofes (2005); Letts & Sears (1999); Unks (1995)

[8] This was seen in the recent battle in Minnesota's largest school district - Anoka-Hennepin. In 2012, homosexuality in this district with a student body of 39,000 had its policy of neutrality challenged. This policy was such that homosexuality became something not discussable, nor bullying because of gender presentation or imputed sexuality, in any way addressable in order to remain neutral. The very idea of creating a GSA was met with vehement reactions with one local Christian activist saying **"**Let's stop this dangerous nonsense before it's too late and more young boys and girls are encouraged to 'come out' and practice their 'gayness' right in their own school's homosexual club" See Sabrina Erdely, "One Town's War on Gay Teens," *Rolling Stone,* February 16, 2012 and Erik Eckholm, "Minnesota School District Reaches Agreement on Preventing Gay Bullying," *New York Times,* March 6, 2012

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