

# Queer Educations: Pondering Perverse Pedagogy

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## *Abstract*

*In the current essay, the author joins work on sexuality, queerness and education by focusing on thinking sex and sexuality through the concept of perversion. While perversion is often used in odious and un-critical ways, the author takes seriously the work of perversion as a social, ethical, and educational concept. The author does so thinking through the continued need for developing and engaging queer sexual ethics in the midst of various and arguably significant gains around gay rights and inclusion. Does perversion open up space to imagine queer education in the face of hetero-and-homonormativity? The author concludes by turning to the Marquis de Sade as a perverse philosopher of education who refutes reproduction in favor of perverse pedagogy.*

**Keywords:** *Queer Pedagogy, Perversion, Marquis de Sade, Controversy, Sexuality*

“The curriculum moves toward the polymorphously perverse...when the problem becomes the making of questions that can unsettle the docility of education.”<sup>1</sup>

“Whereas sexuality has been integrated, that which cannot be integrated, the actual spiciness of sex, continues to be detested by society.”<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Sexuality has a strange place within educational discourses and practices. It refers to ideas around “identity” (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight) propelling debates about inclusion, diversity, and safety. And it refers to “acts” (e.g., abstinence, safe sex) sparking debates about the appropriateness of such a topic. One identifies with a particular sexuality and one’s sexuality is presupposed to connect to particular forms of acts. Sex education has largely been the site where such debates have occurred.<sup>3</sup> And these debates have struggled with how the inclusion of sexuality, both in terms of acts (e.g., (non)reproductive sex) and identities (e.g., homosexuality) are addressed to students. Educational scholarship around sex education has encountered, explored, and exposed the challenges and contradictions when sexuality enters the curriculum. For Silin there was and

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1. Deborah Britzman, *Lost Subjects Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry in Education* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 79.

2. Theodore Adorno, “Sexual Taboos and Law Today,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73.

3. Jonathan Zimmerman, *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2015).

still is a “passion for ignorance” around sex education.<sup>4</sup> And as Gilbert explored, sex education illustrates the anxieties children and adolescents create for adults thinking and teaching around and about issues related to “sexuality” in school.<sup>5</sup> The subject of sexuality in public education is, as Mayo argued, a disputed subject.<sup>6</sup> Historically, sex education has been “the site for working on the bodies of children, adolescents, and teachers” in order to produce subjects that fit within normative and reproductive social ideas.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the anxieties and controversies about youth and sexuality have framed much of the thinking about sexuality in schools.

However, over the last several decades queer scholarship in education has sought to intervene in such anxieties and controversies in order to care for and do justice to the work of and lives of “queerness” beyond the sex education classroom. There has been a concerted effort to reframe the role of and necessity of sexuality in education; this without its own controversies since changing the conversation can upend expectations. “Can the conversation,” Britzman asked, “begin with the educator’s interest in the work of crafting a generous sociality that refuses to justify sexuality through the consolation of fixing a proper place?”<sup>8</sup> Given that some versions of homosexuality have been given a proper place at the table, my conversation starts elsewhere – rather provisionally. Here I consider the word perversion and what work it might do to craft sociality that refuses to be justified or rationalized or made respectable by either hetero- or homonormative standards. My focus in this paper is to explore the challenges and possibilities of perversion in pedagogy to push educational scholarship beyond assimilationist strategies or arguments grounded in “identity.” Perversion more often than not seems to get taken up in the pathological sense in educational work. It is a word thrown in to provoke a reader to see something (e.g., neoliberal reform; technology) as perverting education away from any number of presupposed aims.<sup>9</sup> Or it is used within homophobic logics to illustrate how attending to issues of sexuality could “pervert” children away from imagined heterosexual futures. Rarely, of course, in such arguments is perversion defined, rather its definition is assumed. Its rhetorical flair does the work of provoking a reader to understand the severity of the given issue. Reliance on perversion’s odious history, however, neglects the reality that some find pleasure in the word; that perversion may have histories and aims of its own.

As such, I offer what Sedgwick might call a “reparative” reading of perversion. This is not, to be sure, to make perversion productive for education. It is to speculate about the need for further engagement with sexuality in the face of what seems to be particular forms of societal acceptance. The reality remains that homophobic violence continues to persist in various ways in different spaces, illustrating the precarity of acceptance. Sexuality and the perverse are ever evolving and changing. The task of speculation around perversions then is to resist the need for productive (or reproductive) scholarship that has “utility” in favor of engaging issues of sexuality and autonomy from the perspective of pleasure with aims that focus our attention elsewhere. After all, “Sexual

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4. Jonathan Silin, *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1998).

5. Jen Gilbert, *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

6. Cris Mayo, *Disputing the Subject of Sex: Sexuality and Public School Controversies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

7. Britzman, *Lost Subjects*, 67.

8. *Ibid.*, 78.

9. See for example: Joe Kincheloe, “Exposing the Technocratic Perversion of Education,” in *Key Words in Critical Pedagogy*, eds. Kecia Hayes, Shirley Steinberg, & Kenneth Tobin (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011): 1-20; Dave Hill “Educational Perversions and Global Neoliberalism,” in *Neoliberalism and Education Reform*, eds. E. Wayne Ross & Rich Gibson (Cresskill, NK: Hampton Press, 2006): 107-144.

autonomy requires more than freedom of choice, tolerance, and the liberalization of sex laws. It requires,” as Warner argued, “access to pleasures and possibilities, since people commonly do not know their desires until they find them.”<sup>10</sup> Education rarely assists in helping students find their desires – doing so encounters accusations of impropriety and recruitment. To do so may well provoke accusations of perverting the purpose(s) of education. Thus engaging perversion may challenge education in the midst of education’s half-hearted embrace of GLBTQ concerns to do forsake respectable arguments in favor of those that upend the continued reproduction of various social and sexual norms.

### Sexuality’s Presence

The politics around sexuality are, of course, quickly changing, although for what ends is contestable. It is a topic present in everyday news and visual culture. Same-sex marriage became the law of the land in 2015 in the United States with the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* and this in the midst of increased divorce rates for straight couples over the last several decades and attitudes becoming more lax toward sexual promiscuity. Such changes illustrate the reality that conservative gay desires for marriage and the queer critique of marriage have strangely both seen some success.<sup>11</sup> Same sex couples can marry at the same time interest in marriage, or at least staying married, is waning. Sexuality can be and still is controversial, but the former controversies around gay marriage are subsiding. Left in the wake of such change remains significant challenges that queer people face in the material world based on their sexuality (e.g., bodily harm, job and housing discrimination). While the homonormative dream of accessing marriage rights and becoming “respectable” couples is now a dream come true, there remains the need to address and sustain queer cultures that refuse to embrace such dreams. This is a challenge given the fears and anxieties that still surround queerness in education. The threat of homonormativity—what Lisa Duggan defined as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising...a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” is serious and seriously in need of being challenged.<sup>12</sup>

It is with the need to sustain queer cultures—in the face of homonormativity—that my interest emerges in this speculative essay on perversion. There is a need, perhaps, to pervert queer theory and its aims as queer’s presence changes in education. There still exist concerns and fears that sexuality may pervert the given social order, particularly within education. Sexuality’s presence still provokes. This was notably seen during the 2009 mayoral race in Houston when Rick Scarborough circulated a letter regarding the “Homosexual Agenda” of then candidate Annise Parker. In the letter, Scarborough argued that one part of the homosexual agenda was to “Teach homosexuality to school children, starting in kindergarten, as an acceptable, alternative lifestyle...This enables homosexuals to recruit children to their lifestyle.”<sup>13</sup> Fears of recruitment are, of course, nothing new in education. Yet, such fears illustrate that homophobia (and homophobes)

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10. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 7.

11. See Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1996) and Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*.

12. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 2003), 50.

13. Kyle Mantyla, “Scarborough Jumps into Mayoral Race with Anti-Gay E-mail,” retrieved from <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/scarborough-jumps-houston-mayoral-race-anti-gay-email>.

fantastically believe homosexuality can, in fact, be taught. Teaching can make people gay and the vulnerable of society (e.g., students) need protections from such teachings. Pedagogy is central to such debates because it is what potentially perverts children from imagined heterosexual aims. “Teaching” about homosexuality in schools might, so it seems, cause one to become homosexual. Arguments against such fantastic homophobic logic have turned to science to assert that such logic is preposterous since, one is born gay. A turn to such logic however, as Rohy illustrated is still problematic. “One of the most pernicious effects of ‘born gay,’ then, is its implicit corollary, ‘born straight,’ which obscures all the ways in which heteronormative culture works systematically to interpellate individuals to their proper roles through influences, incentives, and threats.”<sup>14</sup> Whether one is “born gay” or one “becomes gay” may not be something that can be finally determined. Instead, we might move to articulate the need to sustain “queerness” as something related to and intimately connected to social worlds and communities that seek to pervert norms.

Perversion, in the face of queer’s normalization, disrupts the growing institutionalization of particular queer projects and identities. In order to develop this argument, I offer a reading of the Marquis de Sade. Sade, as a perverse philosopher of education, I argue, refuted reproduction in favor of perverse pedagogy. He offers, unlike more recognizable philosophers of education like Kant and Rousseau, a radical assessment of perverse pleasures in pedagogy. His work is queer, indeed, but also presents a queer form of sociality. While queerness and queers are from the vantage of moralists and respectable gay politics viewed as relativist and self-indulgent, Michael Warner articulated an “ethics of queer life.” There is, in Warner’s argument, a “special kind of sociability that holds queer culture together.”<sup>15</sup> And this culture “begins with an acknowledgement of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself.”<sup>16</sup> Far from looking above to see how one should act according to the respectable crowd - keeping up with the Jones’s - within queer circles “you stand to learn most from the people you think are beneath you” cutting “against every form of hierarchy you could bring into the room.”<sup>17</sup> There is dignity in queerness, it is simply that dignity is reconfigured and refuses to be founded on the shaming of sex deemed perverse.

Shaming and/or avoiding sex are commonplace within engagements of sexuality in education. Mainstream arguments for the inclusion of sexual minorities rest on assumptions that sexual minorities are “normal” and “deserving of protections” as persons who identify in particular ways. They must be protected now as new norms of acceptability have been installed. They must not, however, be brought into existence through education. Education has in some regards assimilated particular understandings and representations of sexuality. However, as Todd Jennings argued, there is a need to move beyond assimilationist strategies for teaching about LGBTQ issues in teacher education.<sup>18</sup> While assimilationist strategies have been appealing for some time in education, they have largely failed at engaging the challenges of sexuality and sex to education. To teach transgressive representations, he argued, may be risky since, “Transgressive sexual and gender identities and expressions do have the potential to disrupt and make acceptance more difficult to

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14. Valerie Rohy, *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20.

15. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 35.

16. *Ibid*, 35.

17. *Ibid*, 35.

18. Todd Jennings, “Teaching Transgressive Representations of LGBTQ People in Educator Preparation: Is Conformity Required for Inclusion?” *The Educational Forum*, 79 (4) (2015): 451-458.

achieve because they challenge the notion that anyone could thrive outside narrow heteronormative and gender-normative scripts.”<sup>19</sup> Transgressive sexual and gender identities — identities that pervert normative ideas — are risky and offer scripts that go off the straight-and-narrow path implicit within education’s conservative and reproductive project.<sup>20</sup>

As such, the status of “queer” subjects in education is still contested and controversial. Mary Lou Rasmussen pointed out how the changing demands placed on education programs around certification and accountability have further narrowed the curriculum and the viability of engaging numerous topics, including issues of sexuality and gender.<sup>21</sup> This is true for Australia (Rasmussen’s context), the United States, and other places grappling with neoliberal education reforms that have gone global. As education has been reformed in particular ways, particular pedagogical work becomes more and more unthinkable given that it fails to be productive and profitable. This, however, does not mean that issues around difference are no longer present. Alongside neoliberal reforms are still the continued demands for protections and inclusions of difference in schools. Despite being less able to be engaged in pre-service teacher education, the demands still exist.

GLBTQ students (in different ways) over the last several decades have become viewed as necessary to protect and teach. However, engaging topics of sexuality are still limited and narrow within K-12 schools and teacher education. GLBTQ students exist and should be protected, but engaging topics that challenge various norms, including sexual and gender norms, continue to be rather challenging. Queer topics are still, as Rasmussen and Allen argued operating in a “cul-de-sac” that tethers them to particular domains (e.g., sex education) and topics (e.g., gender and sexuality) making it a challenge to argue and illustrate the importance of sexuality to larger social, political, ethical, and pedagogical issues.<sup>22</sup> This may mean that queer itself needs to be perverted in order to re-articulate its political, ethical, social, and educational stances for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such a project, to be sure, is speculative and provisional as it resists common sense and ideas of the practical that dominate educational work, as Kumashiro has argued.<sup>23</sup>

### On Controversy

Controversy is spatially and temporally bounded, emerging in and bound by a particular time and place. What is controversial “here” may not be “there.” What is controversial “now” may not be controversial “then” and when controversy is seen from afar it often makes little sense. Controversy seems unreasonable; that was controversial, we ask? Recognizing the temporality and spatiality of controversy does not however dispute or disrupt the emotional, political, social, and pedagogical consequences when controversy erupts in a space and time. Or, when such a controversy is imagined to possibly erupt. It is an event that is engaged in its moment. Controversy speaks to the materiality of being in the world and the challenges of coming into that world. This challenge

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19. Ibid, 457.

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

21. Louisa Allen & Mary Lou Rasmussen, “Queer Conversation in Straight Spaces: An interview with Mary Lou Rasmussen about Queer Theory in Higher Education,” *Higher Education and Development*, 34(4) (2015): 696-687.

22. Mary Lou Rasmussen & Louisa Allen, “What can a Concept Do? Rethinking Education’s Queer Assemblages,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 35(3) (2014): 433-443.

23. Kevin Kumashiro, *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

is seen and experienced, particularly, when one is coming into that which is currently considered “controversial.”

Sexuality, particularly homosexuality, has been deemed as controversial in various times and places over the last several decades because of fears that it (in the form of gay teachers or content) would pervert children through fantasized agendas and recruitment strategies. Gay teachers were controversial then, seen in the famous Anita Bryant “Save the Children” campaigns and sometimes become controversial “now” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as religiously affiliated schools grapple with the growing rights of sexual minorities. The controversy around the “gay” teacher in such instances is different – from gay teachers being perverts incapable of teaching children to gay rights disputing the rights of religious organizations. Controversy is not totalizing, albeit who is subjected to such controversy has some staying power, particularly around sexuality. As a queer professor, such issues are things I think about, yet, I am unwilling to entirely allow such fears to dictate what and how I teach. I am not willing to only engage victim narratives of LGBTQ persons, nor am I interested in engaging safe representations of sexuality as I firmly believe, like sex, education without risk doesn’t exist. If, as Eve Sedgwick articulated so poignantly as her first axiom that people are different from one another, then education that takes seriously such difference cannot eschew the potentially controversial as that which is controversial highlights the differences that make up individuals as complex and complicated subjects.<sup>24</sup>

The controversies that erupted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century around “gayness”<sup>25</sup> in education have subsided in many ways. The public largely does not disagree with one another to the same extent as before. One would be hard pressed to find the vitriolic and homophobic language present in the 1970s and 1980s in present day educational arguments and scholarship. Sexual minorities have protections and rights now, for better and for worse. Controversies “then” were taken on and challenged by scholars, activists, and students who defended the legitimacy and legibility of gayness. Sexual minorities are, so it goes, legitimate subjects deserving of rights and with this growing visibility became legible within the curriculum and its objects. Education can read the presence of gayness in the classroom. We can now see clearly the presence of gayness in various histories and projects. Such work was done to push against the normative structures of schools and allow for safe spaces to emerge. Safety is, of course, precarious. Who feels safe and when cannot be a static feeling and is dependent on all sorts of things being present. However, generally speaking, gayness through respectable means has become legitimate and legible in education, in limited ways.

Gayness can be flaunted in some regards, in some contexts, and this is important.<sup>26</sup> It illustrates changes and helps highlight how the work done “then” impacts how we “now” grapple with gayness. Gayness is not controversial. It may in some times and some places still provoke public disagreement and debate, but by and large is agreed to be a topic that is here to stay. This is not to say controversy does not or will not return at the scene of sexuality in education, but that the controversies of yesteryear have largely subsided and provoke far less outcry. However, my hope is that sexuality will continue to provoke controversy in order to maintain the necessary debates around and within the process of becoming a subject in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Noting gayness is not controversial is not meant to be a totalizing statement. Given controversy’s temporal and spatial

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24. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 22.

25. Language is a challenge around sexuality. I utilize gayness to distinguish from queerness. Gayness broadly encapsulating that which has become acceptable and queerness operating as a stance against the status quo and acceptance. Such distinctions fall apart, but are utilized to tease apart distinctions and differences between sexual identities that are recognizable more now than others that are still hidden, for various reasons, from the pedagogical gaze.

26. Therese Quinn & Erica Meiners, *Flaunt It! Queers Organizing for Public Education and Justice* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009).

contingency, controversy may very well erupt around gayness still in different spaces. Daily news highlights momentary blips where sexuality causes controversy, but in our hyper-paced world such controversy quickly subsides from view. Gayness, as such, has become broadly intelligible and therefore far less controversial as part of the educational landscape and something that, despite homophobia's best attempts, is part of education's socializing and qualification project. Within such intelligibility there remains a need to address sexuality beyond what now is accepted in educational discourse.

### On a Polymorphously Perverse Curriculum

Foucault argued “there was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex-specific discourses, different from one another both by their forms and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward.”<sup>27</sup> This incitement to speak about sex occurred at various levels, importantly the institutional level. Education as a socializing institution was implicated in such a proliferation of discourses as the child's sexuality came under surveillance and various techniques emerged for disciplining and training the child through pedagogy. Others came under such institutional discourses with a growing concern that the future of society and its fortunes “were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex.”<sup>28</sup> Education took up the challenges of sexuality and for much of the time since the emergence of these modern discourses has continued to assert developmental understandings of sexuality. Those modes of sexuality that refuse reproduction — be it biological or economic — are ignored in education for such modes pervert the needs of society, as conceived within particular ideological frameworks. However, in being ignored such modes continue to resist and assert their presence. Queer is, as Sedgwick argued, “inextinguishable.”<sup>29</sup>

For much of the twentieth-century schools actively resisted and sought to educate such non-normative sexualities out of students. And for much of the twentieth-century homosexuals in particular have challenged such educational imperatives. We see the minor successes where homosexuality has become a normal, contested, part of the educational landscape. GLBT students have become productive for society as they contribute to the economic wheels and, by seeking admission to marriage and the military, are part of reproducing the national ideas and dreams associated with “America.” This is not new — “we” have been everywhere — but “we” are now out in ways that make our presence legible. It is therefore less and less controversial to teach about homosexuality within particular heteronormative and homonormative frameworks. Such acceptance and inclusion, however, has further disciplined ideas of sexuality and forgotten the multiplicitous sexualities that emerged in the incitement to discourse. While we may have queered education for some time, it may very well be time to pervert it.

Simon Watney (1991) reminded us that perversion helps “theorize all aspects of sexuality that do not have a reproductive aim.”<sup>30</sup> And Bruce Fink argued, “The vast majority of human

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27. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), 18.

28. *Ibid.*, 26.

29. Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), xxi.

30. Simon Watney, “Schools Out” in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diane Fuss (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 396.

sexual behavior is perverse.”<sup>31</sup> This because, in part, most sexual behavior does not lead to biological reproduction. Perversion’s uses lie elsewhere in the excess of social relations that do something to the side of reproduction, including the reproduction of identity. Perversion is that which disrupts biological reproduction and is also that which constitutes human sexuality. We are born perverse and made into subjects of particular repute, if we follow Freud’s arguments.<sup>32</sup> Conceptually, perversion does not seek to be reproducible. Perversions open up space—perhaps controversially—to move away from one form of sexual deviation—one focused on objects (e.g., same-sex object choice)—toward other forms of less identifiable deviations tied to corrupting pleasures. Perversions demand curiosity, are founded on curiosity, in order to create and sustain alternatives. They also possibly allow us to continue the move away from focusing on sexuality’s politics towards sexuality’s sociality. Perverts don’t seek political rights and recognitions, but within the political structure provide outlets and practices for social relations that may or may not escape the gaze of the law.

Gay and lesbian subjects have been embraced, to some extent, within the reproductive logics of education and politics, overcoming their previous association with “perversion.” Perversion, as such, moves toward “queer’s” attention to disrupting what Lee Edelman called reproductive futurism. Reproductive futurism describes, he argued, “Terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”<sup>33</sup> The future is straight and that which challenges the future is deemed queer. Yet, queer has become something with a future itself. Challenges to the future are, more often than not, however, deemed perversions – relations that threaten the reproduction of the world in any number of ways, particularly in education.<sup>34</sup> While gay and lesbian subjects may very well now be part of the future with their new access to marriage, the military, and adoption, there still exists an outside to such forms of social relations. “*Queerness*,” according to Edelman, “names the side of those *not* ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.”<sup>35</sup> Queerness, I argue, should be perverted, refusing the fraught game of politics and engaging the social world in ways that pervert norms for pleasurable, rather than reproductive, ends.

Education is a challenging context for such a topic given education’s conservative nature and reproductive purposes. Education has consistently sought to police and discipline “perversion”—and perverts have historically struggled against the normative practices and claims of education. This makes sense. “This struggle,” against and with homosexuality (a form of perversion), Simon Watney argued, “is waged with special ferocity in those areas of social life where sexual identity is most contested, of which education is perhaps the most significant.”<sup>36</sup> Perversion immediately challenges education’s foundation to reproduce with the hope that perhaps education can do something else. Yet, by challenging education’s foundations, it is important to also recognize it is part of the foundation.

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31. Bruce Fink, “Perversion” in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg and Dennis Foster (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 39.

32. See Sigmund Freud, *The Psychology of Love* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2007).

33. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

34. Adam Greteman & Steve Wojcikiewicz, “The Problems with the Future: Educational Futurism and the Figural Child,” *Journal of Philosophy and Education*, 48 no. 4 (2014).

35. Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

36. Watney, “Schools Out,” 393.

Perversion is a threat in education while also operating as education's constitutive element. Controversies still erupt about the presence of queer students be they trying to go to prom with a same sex date or come out in a commencement speech or simply wear t-shirts that express support for gay friends. Straight or gay, expressing support or being seen to be "promoting" homosexuality is still scandalous. This may be less so than three decades ago, but it still exists. However, I am less interested in exploring or mapping the threats of perversion as they are seen in the lives of students, teachers, or curricular concerns. Arguments grounded in "health" or "safety" or "nature" or "God" used to articulate why perversions need to be held at bay from schools are important, but not my concern here. Rather, I want to turn here to a philosopher of perversion – the Marquis de Sade – who established philosophical arguments for education grounded in perversion. Sade was opposed to reproduction and instead interested in exploring the possibilities in and through sexuality. Sade articulated a rather perverse pedagogy.

### Sade's Perverse Education

Camille Paglia insisted, "every road from Rousseau leads to Sade."<sup>37</sup> Yet, it would seem the road to Sade has yet to be arrived at in education. Erica McWilliams noted the work of Sade "...refuses, perversely, the modernist logic of an upward and forward movement of identity."<sup>38</sup> Sade is quite unreasonable and "Reasonable people" McWilliams argued, "as enlightened thinkers, seek to distance themselves from such perversity."<sup>39</sup> It seems apt to refuse such distancing and turn to Sade's perversity, remembering as Jonathan Dollimore pointed out, that "perversion" is an important but obsolete meaning of diversity. Distancing oneself from the perversity or refusing the road to Sade, may very well prove to be a distancing from the challenges and risks of diversity and education.<sup>40</sup>

Sade's utilizations of the figure of the pervert and his ideas of transgression compel his readers to question quite a lot. Antonio de Nicolás contended, "the Marquis de Sade should be compulsory reading for all those people who claim to be the owners of a liberal education and who claim to be free citizens" for "there is no better test to find out how deep our habits of mind are impressed in us through the education we have received."<sup>41</sup> Madame St. Ange, one of the teachers in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, argued it is "to free public schools, and to charitable establishments that we owe the terrible disorder in which we presently live"<sup>42</sup> because such institutions subjugate students, particularly females to the constraints of society and the demands of parents on females to "suppress, wait, and while waiting, endure worse than hell's torments until it pleases her parents."<sup>43</sup> Mme. St. Ange continues "No, Eugénie...it is necessary that when once she reaches the age of reason the girl be detached from the paternal household, and after having received a public education, it is necessary that at the age of fifteen she be left her own mistress to become what she

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37. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 20.

38. Erica McWilliams, *Pedagogical Pleasures* (New York: Peter Lang), 176.

39. *Ibid.*, 176.

40. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde; Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

41. Antonio Nicolas, *Habits of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. (New York: Paragon Press, 1989), 164.

42. Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Stories*, trans. Richard Seaver & Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press), 216.

43 *Ibid.*, 219.

wishes.”<sup>44</sup> Sade’s education is one of undoing, transgressing the limits of parental and free public education in the attempt to allow students to become what a student wishes. Sade’s education is one of perversion that negates the importance for reproduction, particularly for females.

Horkheimer and Adorno noted, “For Sade, enlightenment was not so much an intellectual as a social phenomenon...his work lays bare the mythological nature of the principle on which civilization was based after the demise of religion: those of the Decalogue, of paternal authority, of property.”<sup>45</sup> “Sade humiliates reason with sensuous nature,” Pierre Klossowski maintained “and humiliates the ‘rational’ sensuous nature with perverse reason.”<sup>46</sup> Sade, of course, writes to challenge and refute the repressions of society — that which dare not be spoken (e.g. atheism, sodomy) in order to “produce the irregular individual” (p. 192). His is still reason, but reason steeped in perversion. The subject emerges, for Sade, through the senses. Sade’s education seeks to produce irregularity, to pervert the subjects produced by the social norms espoused by the educational context of his age. His was an education rendered to do something else with the world. Sade’s perverse thought illuminates the problems with norms and the assault norms have on pleasure and liberty with a relationship to the social that is grounded in pleasure. While Sade was institutionalized in prisons and asylums, spending much of his life in rather solitary spaces, such experiences also provided him pleasure, as his biography illustrated.

Sade is compelling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because he cannot be divorced from sex for sex was central to his project. While sexuality as identity has come to dominate how we engage matters of “sexuality” today, often divorced from sex, Sade focused on perverse acts and their education. He theorized his practices—his individual tastes—to create an ethic because “eroticism appeared to him to be the only possible fulfillment of his existence.”<sup>47</sup> Sade’s work is much more than sex, of course, but sex is central to his theorizing. He thinks through his time and life with sex, but this is sex unconfined by modern discourses of sexology, rather it is on the cusp between the old regime and the new. His use of cruelty and violence seeks to do something—to provoke—as it did reactions to his work. “Sade’s libertinism” Judith Butler remarked “is not simple hedonism: he does not celebrate sexual sensation as such but rather offers a systematic approach to sexual gratification.”<sup>48</sup> Butler continued, “Although his cruelty cannot be said to be ethically good, it becomes part of an ethic because a plethora of justifications arrive to support its practice.”<sup>49</sup> His texts—at least the portion of them that survived—propound on this ethic in order to create space—as perversion—to examine the limits (ethical and political). Reading Sade then—particularly in education—for his perverse imagination illuminates a trenchant challenge to the Enlightenment and its reasonableness. There is, after all, a method to his madness, but it is a method that disrupts the status quo.

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44. Ibid., 219.

45. Theodore Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 90.

46. Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 17.

47. Simone de Beauvoir, “Must We Burn Sade,” in *120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings*, eds. Austryn Wainhouse & Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 18.

48. Judith Butler, “Beauvoir on Sade: Making Sexuality into an Ethic,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir*, ed Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 174.

49. Ibid.

“Sade's text realizes,” as Harari wrote, “the figure of the ‘mad philosopher,’ alienated in language, by investing his libertine characters with a ‘limitless discourse’—a discourse that is perpetually transgressive by virtue of its attempts both to restore the truth function of desire and to reactivate the desiring function of truth.”<sup>50</sup> Sade, more than other Enlightenment philosophers, goes to the dark places of humanity not to “provoke criminal behavior” but to “provoke instead the elaboration of phantasms that have long remained excluded from our—ascetic and incorrigibly ethical—occidental imaginary.”<sup>51</sup> He goes there to teach and allow desires to be found. After all, as Jane Gallop noted, Sade’s oeuvre is “a meditation on teaching” where what is “repeatedly represented is a confrontation between ignorance as innocence and knowledge as power—a confrontation constitutive of the classroom dialectic.”<sup>52</sup> Sade via his libertine characters taught lessons. These lessons were complex—in part because of Sade's insistence of teaching through sexuality—both the ways sexuality forms libertine subjects but also how sexuality disrupts and is central to sociality. Sade through his libertine instructor Dolmancé instructs his pupil Eugénie to “do away with your constraints, your chastisements, your habits.”<sup>53</sup> Sade’s novelic imagination immediately asserts itself as attempting to disrupt habits, expose habits of thinking and doing and being in 18<sup>th</sup> Century France. It is, in part, Sade's educational thought that asks for undoing the habits instilled in us from a young age via parents, public education, and society. He perverts those habits that have become reproduced as necessary or educational. The education Sade proposes in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is thus laid out in the form of a dialogue—drawing upon the Socratic form—in order to pervert the borders between reason and unreason.

Perversion becomes a mode of education, struggling for one's liberty and working against the stultifying aims of society—particularly society’s ways of educating and parenting. Straddling the classical and the modern world, Sade theorized liberty—from parents, from God, from a corrupt society—through the sexed body—seeking to liberate sexuality and the body from the oppressive regimes of religion, revolution, and reproduction to create the possibility for pleasure and passion as sensibilities that trumped the growing focus on reason and rationality. Of course, one cannot read Sade without recognizing his hyper-rationality and intense focus on reasoned argumentation, but Sade does so in its extremity to push through reason while not forgoing reason to expose passion and pleasure. Satisfaction is the ultimate goal of Sade. He frustrates but always with his eyes on the prize of satisfaction—fleeting glimpsed and sensed—before starting on the next lesson. Sade refused to be reasonable for reason restricted other ways of experiencing the world.

For Sade and his perversions he asked that we “never lose sight of the fact it is free men we wish to form, not the wretched worshippers of a god”<sup>54</sup> and in doing so,

Give them many more examples than lessons, many more demonstrations than books, and you will make good citizens of them: you will turn them into fine warriors, fine fathers, fine husbands: you will fashion men that much more devoted to their country’s liberty,

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50. Josue V. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary: Theorizing the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 192.

51. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary*, 192.

52. Jane Gallop, “The Immoral Teachers,” *Yale French Studies*, 63, (1982): 117.

53. Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Stories*, 203.

54. *Ibid.*, 304.

whose minds will be forever immune to servility, forever hostile to servitude, whose genius will never be troubled by any religious terror.<sup>55</sup>

The libertine education does not rest on reading the books of the past, but on merging theory with practice, demonstrating the challenges it takes to be free, to think, and to live in a world of contested, contingent beings. This education is cruel, demanding of students and instructors to not do as they are told, but to question and question some more. The purpose of such an education is less to reproduce or maintain the social order. “No need to touch at greater length on what pertains to the dull business of population,” Mme St. Ange noted, “from now on we shall address ourselves principally, nay, uniquely, to those libertine lecherries whose spirit is in no wise reproductive.”<sup>56</sup> The pedagogical task of Sade’s perverse teachers was to open up students to question and experience the world of pleasure without or perhaps through the refusal to reproduce what was already known, felt, or experienced. His perverse pedagogy sought to allow his pupil to sense the world anew.

### Conclusion

Simon Watney argued in the early years of queer thinking, “Something else is needed—the active presence of a confident lesbian and gay culture that clothes homosexual desires in a stable, collective, *social* identity.”<sup>57</sup> Then, in the early 1990s, such a presence was largely unimaginable, particularly in schools. Decades later after important struggles on the street, courtrooms, hallways, seminar rooms, and family rooms, a confident “lesbian and gay” culture (or more so cultures) can be seen. Such cultures—particularly those that are respectable—are catered to by corporations and have lobby groups to advocate for their “gay agenda.” Such changes are, as with most things, both useful and problematic. Change can be seen in terms of who is seen as a viable subject. Particular gay authors, artists, and people have gained notoriety and a place on the school desk. Children’s books like *Heather has Two Mommies* and *And Tango Makes Three* in some places provoke less controversy in elementary schools allowing family structures to include single-parent households, gay households, and lesbian households as viable for rearing children. This is good, to be sure. Queer work in education has had some success. Yet, there continues to exist, as seems obvious, those who do not fit within this more inclusive representation. There are still perverts among us. Inclusion is, as Bingham and Biesta (2009) have argued, in question.<sup>58</sup>

If inclusion is in question, that which raises questions is probably something that may very well be controversial—provoking public disagreement. As some are ushered into inclusive social institutions, the controversies of those still excluded come to represent a certain threat to one’s newfound inclusion. Those less “respectable” or less “normal” may, it seems, threaten the new inclusion. Yet, such threats are part and parcel the work of perversion as it challenges the ever-changing reproduction of inclusive spaces and ideas. Perversion cannot be a stable thing that can be included, but must represent the excess, that which operates outside and exceeds the recognizable or intelligible. The excesses of perversions, are a challenge for schools and at its best will remain such a challenge—refusing domestication, normalization, and reproduction. Perversion

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55. *Ibid.*, 305.

56. *Ibid.*, 201.

57. *Ibid.*, 392.

58. Charles Bingham & Gert Biesta, *Jacques Ranciere: Education, Emancipation, Truth* (New York: Continuum 2009).

then—unlike gayness and the now accepted queerness—has not experienced the same level of approval and inclusion. Perversion has yet and refuses to be assimilated and reproduced in schools. GLBT subjects—both in terms of students and curriculum context—exist and have achieved some levels of hospitality in schools.<sup>59</sup> This essay has sought to provisionally engage contemporary issues around sexuality by attending to its inherent perversions. Such a provisional engagement was to open up space to recognize the inroads made around the formerly perverse (e.g., homosexuality) while articulating the possibilities of perversions yet “included.” If inclusion is an open question, perversion raises questions about that which has now been included due to the varied queer projects that have been articulated over the course of decades. Perversion calls into question the commodified and reproducible ways in which queerness and queers have come to operate. Queerness, put simply, needed perverting.

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59. Jen Gilbert, “‘Let Us Say Yes to Who or What Turns Up’: Education as Hospitality.” *Journal for the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies*, 4(1) (2006): 25-34.