

**Indigenous Knowledge & Queering Epistemology Practices**  
**An Experiential Framework: A Practice in Dynamic Identification in ACTION**  
**A Templated Facilitation Agenda with Instructions**

**Participants/Audience:** College, Grad, Professional levels of interest in working towards more equitable work, school, and community spaces

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**Background**

In the antiracist community work I do, I often merge ways to secularize theological-religious or spiritual concepts to reach a broader mixed audience. The word God for example turns into the language of nature, the universe, analogies of the body and mind, and maybe even astrological conceptualizations. From my multireligious spiritual earth-based traditions and curiosities, spirit/spirituality is never removed or separated from any other idea or understanding. BIPOC and people coming from the LGBTQIA+ communities nationally in the United States tend to educate and call in these frames of epistemologies that can be deduced if desired to “queering” practices. For example, certain Black queers would consider Blackness as it’s defined in the United States and used as a bar of oppression is often reclaimed to be considered queer itself when noting the historical power and agency of enslaved African descendants working to fight systems of oppression. However, not necessarily explicit in nature, the ways of any modality actively removing itself from dominant cultural practices and politic in such antiracist frameworks can be considered “queer.”

I would argue the concept of reclaiming the word queer as a form of exploring politics, spirituality, religiosity, and identity can create a pathway of dismantling the practice of identification for separation/othering altogether. In certain indigenous languages, there are more verbs than there are nouns and so there are fewer ways to *identify* consciousness and more ways of **being and practicing consciousness**. If we take the idea of queering one step further beyond pivoting from the norm to become beings that “queer” we expand and stretch the horizon of what’s possible when countering oppression. To approach getting to the most optimal and inclusive ways to relate to each other, what if we decide to centralize our antiracist, counter-oppressive efforts in the ACTION of being queer? In “queering” all that we do and name it as such is an example of what the LGBTQIA+ community has always done in creating novel pathways to be our authentic conscious whole selves.

Boon Lin Ngeo’s dissertation *WE ARE COMRADES!--TONGZHI (COMRADE) THEOLOGY () AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES OF GOD IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM, 2013*<sup>1</sup> speaks to this idea of Tghonzi theology being for everyone

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<sup>1</sup> Boon Lin, Ngeo, "WE ARE COMRADES!--TONGZHI (COMRADE) THEOLOGY () AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES OF GOD IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM" (PhD diss., Boston University School of Theology, 2013), 130.

(Ngeo, 180) not unlike socialism and communism, but also too like indigenous epistemologies where kinship is recognized to be in relationship with all beings, not just humans but everything of essence that is alive and creating the world. This means from the trees to the ocean waters, to the elements of fire and air that make materials we use every day for comfort, pleasure, and entertainment, we are in kinship to it all. Therefore, what does queering look and feel like in all bodies and how can it involve everyone, yet still root in the authentic and inherent agency of the queer community and avoid the universalistic erasure of our dynamic ontologies?

This framework doesn't address all that relates to Queer culture and Indigenous Cultures nor does it try to deduce from it. It's a short foundation to inviting a different way of thought and action to a place that is familiar and unknown. This isn't new information but it is framed from my perspective that addresses my intersectional being.

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*From discussion and readings from a Queer Liberation Theology class in Spring 2023 at Starr King School for the Ministry in Oakland, CA and Indigenous books on how we can reshape our world, below is an agenda for a 2.5-hour workshop that involves ways to personally, culturally, communally, and organizationally address and counter the oppressive dominant culture from a more queer theological framework and perspective. It's a workshop in an attempt to focus on queering in action rather than the static naming of identifying what is and isn't queer. It's an exploration of how to start a conversation in the inclusion of people both apart of the queer community and not who can be accomplices, co-conspirators in the dismantling of oppression and also still hold deep respect for the utilization of identity and affinity with a useful and powerful tool. A both/and formula of being queer and not queer to counter oppression. Not all activities are outlined, but some have been linked for a more detailed experiential illustration of how one could go about leading, holding space, or even participating in a workshop that carries a throughline discussion of the nature of "queering" as a framework and what this means personally or collectively to anyone regardless of LGBTQIA+ affiliation. This workshop can be done virtually or in person.*





Framework Practice

| Topic                          | Activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Queer Reasoning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <p><b>Welcome (15 min)</b></p> | <p><b>Embodied Practice of Attention “1, 2, 3”</b></p> <p>Invite participants to practice a method of deeper sensing. They will be asked to focus on listening, witnessing, and touching up to 3 things in their environment. An inclusive way of doing this practice for those who sense differently will be provided an alternative direction.</p> <p>Ask participants: Please lower your eyelids or shut your eyes. Alternatively, please sit still in the space you’re in. After taking 3 deep breaths, I invite you to listen for 3 different sounds in your</p> | <p>Slowing down and taking moments to notice individual senses that arise and fall mindfully can be considered not just a somatic practice, mindful practice, or even type of spiritual practice. It can also be seen as a queer practice when defining queer as a thing to describe a way to counter dominant culture practice of “sense of urgency” or “worship of the written word” whereby many times in teaching spaces, facilitation spaces, and/or workshop spaces there are immediate moves to</p> |

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|                                               | <p>space. Alternatively, I invite you to sense internally in your body, 3 different sensations. I will allow for three minutes for you to pay attention to what you may be hearing and/or sensing within.</p> <p>Now, let's move to opening your eyes or raising your eyelids. If you were sitting still and you can move about, shake off the stillness. I am going to ask you to witness or observe two items in your room. Alternatively, try and touch two different items in your room, that may have different types of textures to them. We will spend two minutes focusing on what we are observing or touching. Try to observe and feel every inch of the items, noting similarities and differences.</p> <p>Lastly, I invite you all to shake off those experiences and I will invite you now to notice one (1) scent/odor. Alternatively, grab water/tea a take a sip hanging onto the liquid in your mouth for as long as you can before swallowing. We'll take one minute to focus on this.</p> <p>When ready, shake it all off and return to the present moment of what's in front of you. All senses aware and active.</p> | <p>jump to slides, overview of presentation, and verbal/visual cues rather than an attempt to be present to all parts of ourselves.</p> <p>Letting people connect to their body at the pace and sense that feels right to them invites and excites their own levels of self awareness and management. It's also an attempt to counter the focus on the mind and try to involve, mind, body, and spirit at the start. This could be one practice that can be seen as a "queering" action of embodiment. Further questions to explore:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are other senses we don't discuss that can be invited into this practice?</li> <li>2. Could bringing in a spiritual/religious prayer, phrase, ritual be an act of queering in a typical secular space?</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Check-in &amp; Debrief (30 min)</b></p> | <p><b>Community Connection</b></p> <p>In a small group, answer the following questions with your group:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your sexuality/creativity?</li> <li>2. What is your gender?</li> <li>3. What are your</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p>These check-in questions allow for participants to build community, discover affinity, and become curious. The questions can open discussion on the simple</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

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|                                                                                            | <p>pronouns?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Do you identify as queer?</li> <li>5. Are you comfortable with discussing these identities in your group and do you notice and/ or believe there are other identities which can be considered queer?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>terms of how folks see the queer umbrella while also exploring how the umbrella can be more expansive beyond the normalcy of queer culture.</p> <p>Other ideas to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The facilitator could be more explicit with stretching identity and definition and ask participants direct questions of what could be considered “queer”, such as Blackness, layers of ability, art etc.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Intro to Queering Framework (20 min)</b></p> <p><b>Practice handout (20 min)</b></p> | <p>Let’s define queer.<br/>Ask participants how they personally define queer.</p> <p>Facilitator: Address the definitions and bring in the historical definition of “queer defined as “odd or different.” Expand this idea of different as something considered to be “not normal” then ask participants</p> <p>Define “normalcy/ normal?”</p> <p>Have participants journal or try on drawing an image that comes to mind for “normal.” Or a movement in the body or facial expression. Allow for people to reflect without sharing into the space.</p> <p>Facilitator: Bridge ideas of culture norms from a white supremacy dominant culture perspective, such as:</p> | <p>First having the participants define queer centers the agency in the individual to allow for their definition to be present in the space and to own their own definition.</p> <p>Defining normal through an image, words, or silent reflection can offer the group especially those who identify as queer in the space a refreshing break from the ongoing normative “affront” to their existence. It also lessens the weight and importance of the social umbrella metanarrative that invades most people’s daily lives. To have them keep their image/reflection to themselves allows for</p> |

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|                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self and personal gain</li> <li>• Competition and Superiority</li> <li>• Anthropocentric ideas</li> <li>• Absolutism or Essentialism</li> <li>• Self Knowledge Not Highest Priority</li> <li>• Emphasis on Rights<sup>2</sup></li> </ul> <p>Ask participants how they may see “differing”, OR “queering” these dominant culture practices by using a handout:</p> <p> A Queering Framework...</p> | <p>boundaries and spaciousness to roam in a location without exploring the binary so explicitly.</p> <p>The framework actively engages one's own thinking about:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How they can explore the power of “queering” or being “labeled” as different as an act of internal resource and agency.</li> <li>2. Introduce language of some dominant culture practices via the lens of indigenous people of “Turtle Island” and redefine how they can be seen differently</li> <li>3. Allow for participants to have their own communal queer connections to support the way variant queer perspectives can be uplifted and shared in mixed company.</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>CASEL Framework: Bridging Queering Frame with the Indigenous Knowledge (10 min)</b></p> <p><b>Debrief Handout (20 min)</b></p> | <p>Present the slide showing the Casel model highlighting responsible decision making.</p> <p> A Queering Framewo...</p> <p>Discuss with the group the <b>CASEL SEL wheel</b>.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p><b>Social Emotional Learning</b> or (SEL) as seen from the <a href="#">CASEL Framework</a><sup>3</sup> can be an approach to aide participants to share their truth in layers, starting with the feelings of self</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

<sup>2</sup> Wahinkpe Topa ( Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvaez, PhD. Restoring the Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing Life on Planet Earth, p5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Website: <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#responsible>

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|  | <p>Using this model and diagram. The queering framework when connecting it to indigenous methodologies and epistemologies, the idea for changing a countering oppression is centered in these three bullet points under responsible decision making:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Getting to a place to critically think both in communities that do the same but on one's own when not apart of a structured space</li> <li>2. Reflecting on how one's actions and ways of relating impact others personally, professionally, communally etc</li> <li>3. This reflection then leads to deeper expansive evaluation of institutional, community, interpersonal and personal impacts</li> </ol> <p>Facilitator: Reflect with the group leading by the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How did it feel to work on that activity?</li> <li>2. What did you learn from your group about dominant culture and ways to shift perspective and definitions that don't possibly align with your cultural values?</li> <li>3. How do these changes in dominant cultural practices create opportunities to see queering as a</li> </ol> | <p>awareness. <b>Self awareness</b> moves to <b>self management</b> by way of once one recognizes their feelings in a situation they can start taking steps in managing them. Not to confuse the word manage with control but to note for example if one is aware of what excites them about this reflection process they can direct the energy to a goal that is worthwhile. The 3rd layer in the framework is social awareness. Most of this workshop today bounced from self awareness to social awareness. (<i>How do I identify and define queer and how do I connect this information in a social setting with people that may have different ideas than me</i>)? <b>Social awareness</b> leads to building healthy and supportive <b>relationships and skills</b> that can inform balance and boundaries in <b>decision making practices</b>.</p> <p>Ultimately a framework that supports social learning that brings in our emotions and feelings, brings in spirit, brings in values and beliefs. It brings in the wholeness of who we are as people and therefore centering that in any space, the modeling of queering can ensure the consideration of the multiplicity of anything and everything</p> |
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|                                                           | <p>necessary strength to counter oppression?</p> <p>4. Would you accept or use this language of “queering” to match countering oppression or is this still a phrase to be used strictly for and by the LBTQIA+ community? Why/Why not?</p> <p>5. Based on the CASEL SEL wheel, when addressing hard topics which require decision making, where do you typically root? <b>Self awareness, social awareness, self management, relationship, decision making (take action)?</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>in a space. It calls attention to those not seen or heard. It elevates taking careful and graceful action in considering the many dynamics that are at play in the world. It considers, like many indigenous folks pray to : For all our relations.</p> |
| <p><b>Labyrinth of Identity and Ontology (20 min)</b></p> | <p>Facilitator walks the participants through this exercise. If virtual, they are shown an image of a labyrinth. If in person, one has been created or they are at a place which contains a labyrinth.</p> <p>Guide participants saying:<br/>Consider entering a labyrinth that exemplifies constant motion, movement outward and inward like one's breath to discover how creatures with conscious identities can move in and out of space holding tight to mind-body-spirit and letting them go as well. <i>Consider the student who graduates from college. In many ways the student lets go of their college identity upon graduating but is now a college graduate who</i></p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



*once was a student. With something lost was gained. With something gained was lost. The process of emergence is cyclical and mysterious. Is the college student divorced from learning or being a student once they graduate? They may label their curiosities differently but they may deem they are always learning even in the still perception of their becoming.*

Now envision you entering into this labyrinth:

**In what ways do you identify?**

**In thinking of queering your labels, how do those identities show up in action? In action that counters oppression?**

Now imagine, as you get closer to the center of the labyrinth there is less room or space for all the identities we hold.

**What are the first identities we drop to make room?**

**What is one identity we must hold tight to as it defines the wholism of our being?**

Rest in this center space for a moment and feel into this identity.

**What is it? How are you defining it? How does it operate and function? How does it serve you? How does it serve the**

**community? Family?  
Work? Etc?**

**Can it be considered a  
“queering” identity? In  
what ways does it show  
up and push against the  
norm? In what ways  
does it invite inclusivity?  
How may it expand the  
notion of what it’s  
traditionally known for?**

Now slowly make your  
way back, leaving how  
you came...

When exiting the  
labyrinth the same way  
you entered, you can  
gather those identities  
you let go. From that  
place of gathering and  
letting go, **do you let  
some stay close to the  
Earth and let them sink  
in and become a part of  
the ground?**

**Which ones do you feel  
you need hang onto?  
Which ones can be given  
to the ocean? The fires?  
The wind? Could some  
be shared with others?**

Thank this labyrinth and  
process for providing a  
form of restoration in  
what you may deem is  
important in how you  
relate to your self and the  
world. Give gratitude for  
the dynamism of identity  
allowing for space to  
discover other forms of  
identity and illustrating

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|                          | power for ways that holding onto some can strengthen our convictions as we navigate our self, relationships, and the world. In what you may deem as actionable ways to better relationships to those you are in relationship with, how does this dynamism of identity queer the norm and counter oppression? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Takeaways (5 min)</b> | Facilitator Summarizes session with slide 8<br><input type="checkbox"/> A Queering Framewo...                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Close (5 min)</b>     | Facilitator: What image are you using as a guide as we end our time together?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Closings can conclude the meeting space with last words of phrases.<br><br>With an activity to choose your “queer guide” it can end on something fun that may represent the embodied mood of the participants. |

**Conclusion:**

*This framework is an emergent practice of tuning into the senses of critical theories. What happens when we allow our lived experiences to guide us and lead others in communities? What were the ways we navigated the world, to be seen, heard, expressed that visibilized our worth and dignity under oppressive systems attempting to control, manipulate, and keep the public discordant from connection? This experiential queering framework speaks to my lived experience of how queer as an action can disrupt white supremacy culture and dominant oppressive forces and provide alternative pathways to our whole selves and all those around us. Bending the ways we approach language, connection, our bodies, identities are just a few conceptualisations this queering framework attempts to address. This is a counter oppressive framework centering the body, mindy, and spirt in conjunction with questioning what identities are and can be. Forming a deeper relational connection instead of defaulting to the ways we connect through*

*systemic oppression, I invite you to explore one of these techniques outlined or try on the workshop practices. A written outline of a framework is too normative for this topic. Experientially practicing an exercise may support the embodied element of the framework creating an opportunity to embody counter oppression in your respective location. Enjoy!*