



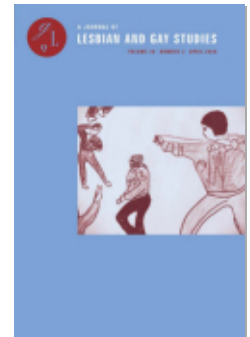
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The Queer Love Project: AESA, Fatigue, and Building the Body
of an Organization

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THE QUEER LOVE PROJECT

AESA, Fatigue, and Building the Body of an Organization

**Boni Wozolek, Silvia C. Bettez, Roland Sintos Coloma,
and Hilton Kelly**

Boni Wozolek: So for the purpose of this forum I thought it would be beneficial to include an interview with the leadership team of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA) because, well, I think the fact that the leadership has been relatively inclusive of queer voices signals something that speaks to the way the organization functions despite fatigue. So my question is, always, how do we, as a community, build these spaces? What does it mean to build spaces for queer voices in general and, in specific, queer voices of color, in the academy, both in and across fields of education?

Roland Sintos Coloma: Are we the first three out, queer presidents of color in AESA? In terms of AESA presidents who are part of the LGBTQ community, there's Cris Mayo prior to us.

Hilton Kelly: I know that there have been other presidents who identified as gay—for example, Dennis Carlson at Miami University of Ohio, who is deceased now.

Silvia C. Bettez: . . . and Kathleen deMarrais!

RC: I want to flag in terms of genealogy that there's been queer work and leadership at AESA. There are some of us who are outwardly queer and also do outwardly queer work. There are some of us who are queer but don't necessarily do queer work. So there are layers here that we could unpack and, significantly, to the extent to which AESA is open to queer leadership and queer work. But when I think of panel sessions at AESA, frankly, it's still the same folks who are attending those conversations. It's not as if the general membership is flocking to those sessions to engage, to learn, to do collaborative work on queer or queer of color work.

SB: I would say that's true for lots of things, of genres at work. I mean, it's been a critique. I think that is part of what Hilton was speaking to in his presidential address during the 2018 conference in Greenville, South Carolina. This is specifically part of what I'm thinking about with planning an unconference for the 2019 meeting in Baltimore, working to facilitate these critical dialogues to be open about the challenges and possibilities as we move forward as an organization. I remember my first experience at AESA when we were in Mexico City, and I looked around and there were a lot of Latinx people that year and I just had this feeling of "wow!" These people are doing social justice, working outside the box. It's not all about traditional schooling. One of the most powerful sessions that I went to that year was about people doing work with out, queer youth that heavily wove intersectionality into the papers. I found the conference gave me a space, as a grad student, to think about my passions.

RC: Part of what excites me is that AESA is a space that allows the opportunity to bring together the various parts of me—intellectually, politically, and personally—in one space. It would be fantastic if we could really continue to work within the intersections that Silvia is mentioning, not just about Queer Battle Fatigue (QBF), but the possibilities of advocacy, resilience, activism. Intersectionality in ways that are really productive, rich, and exciting.

HK: You know, it's interesting when you talk about Queer Battle Fatigue (QBF). I think that this conference is a place where you can get away from that. So QBF is often happening on your college campus—your place of employment. AESA has become this space for many of us to get away—just like it has become a space for me to get away from Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF). It allows me to go back to my institution and live another day—fight another day. But there's no thing called "AESA." There's no physical entity there. People write, present papers, and create an environment. And one of the things I've said to queer people in the organiza-

tion, who are writing about LGBTQ issues, is that the organization will not do it (make space) for you. People will have to do it. So the more proposals we receive, the more research that's done, then we/they start to see a change. Organizations, like AESA, can become a space for queer bodies and/or scholarship, but it is definitely not a given. How does an organization become a kind of refuge—away from QBF and RBF?

BW: So I've been thinking a lot about how violence can spill and diffuse into spaces, but I also know that there have been a lot of strong scholars who are looking at the other side of that coin, thinking about love as a radical act. I'm wondering how questions of love in this space that is an oasis spill into and over other parts of your life as an academic where questions of fatigue and violence are very real concerns.

RC: The question that popped into my mind is: What does queer love look like in an academic setting? In ways that we may not find in our home institutions?

HK: If we look at it at the organizational level, we have exclusion, but we also have a kind of love project around queerness. Exclusion—there is no love. Tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion. Is tolerance or acceptance the same as inclusion? I think inclusion is something different and is something that we ought to strive for. And I wonder, "Have we moved as an organization from acceptance to inclusion?" Thinking of bodies and bodies of scholarship as a kind of love project can be understood as the measure of an organization. You know, the acceptance or inclusion of queer bodies and queer scholarship as actualized goals. While I think that bodies are accepted and included in AESA, I do think that we have a larger problem in the field—queer students and subjects remain taboo.

RC: What you said, Hilton, that bodies get to be accepted, but the scholarship may not be included. I think, for example, of scholars like Ed Brockenbrough, who unapologetically does very radical, queer of color work that is embedded in intellectual and political projects. At what point will someone like Ed be elected as president of AESA? And is that our measure of success? Is that how we measure that we [as queers of color] have arrived? And to what extent do we think about mother-scholar work? To what extent are we thinking about queer women's lives and experiences within that work? I think we still haven't fully unpacked that, and it could be a part of Queer Battle Fatigue at conferences and in our home institutions. Do we have accepting places that are still quite heteronormative?

SB: As someone who is invested heavily in critical community building, and that comes out of the scholarship that I do about these intersections of violence and

love, I appreciate the conversation being raised here. In planning and carrying out this work, trying to start and maintain critical conversations through a conference and an unconference, there's a lot of work involved. The body fatigue, on top of the emotional fatigue, is real. But it's also about survival. We have to do the work to keep a space for ourselves and the people we love and care about. Also, I'm very aware of the people who did the work before me, who did it for my generation. I feel grateful and guided by people who put themselves on the line to create spaces for someone like me. So there's an accountability, responsibility to continue what others started for the continued survival and thriving of the community.

RC: I go back to queer feminists of color, like Anzaldúa and Lorde, and the kind of toil that it takes to be fully who we are in academe. We stand on those legacies. I am so mindful of that. How I have become, how we have become as an organization. . . . These roads were paved and paid for by people before us. I think it's our responsibility to provide more opportunities for others because others have come before us and have done this so we can be, really *be* where we are today.

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ALLIES, ACCOMPLICES, AND AGGRESSIONS

The Pernicious Nature of Queer Battle Fatigue

Walter S. Gershon

This short essay underscores the depth and pervasive nature of Queer Battle Fatigue (QBF) (Wozolek, Varndell, and Speer 2015), articulated from a particular positionality: allyship. As a person who has spent a lifetime in solidarity with my queer sisters and brothers—from protests and the physical protection of queers in my twenties to more active roles as a K–12 educator and over the past two decades in higher education (e.g., Gershon, Lather, and Smithies 2009)—I have long since become accustomed to the tensions that are part of being an ally, of standing with but not being a member of individuals and groups. As I argue further below, the point is not to compare difficulties faced by LGBTQ++ peoples with those of their allies or to imply some kind of parallel to particular queer positionalities that are