Spring 5-10-2013

The Rhetoric of Queer: Subverting Heteronormative Social Institutions and Creating New Meaning

Marissa Nolan
Georgia State University

THE RHETORIC OF QUEER: SUBVERTING HETERONORMATIVE SOCIAL

INSTITUTIONS AND CREATING NEW MEANING

by

MARISSA NOLAN

Under the Direction of Dr. George Pullman

ABSTRACT

The word "queer" generates mixed feelings. For some, it is a way to denigrate gays and lesbians, though, in recent years, those in LGBT communities have re-appropriated the term and have given it a more positive spin. This project aims to investigate exactly that kind of social action, specifically, looking at the way some take socially constructed norms and queer them in order to develop new meanings. First, this thesis explores how social norms impacted identity creation in ancient Rome and Greece. It then surveys the theories behind norms, along with their formation and maintenance in current society. Next, this project looks at queer theory and how norms have shaped the ways we build our identities, and vice versa. Finally, this research takes a rhetorical perspective by applying components of the canon to different elements of identity cultivation and presentation, with invention representing the former and delivery the latter.

INDEX WORDS: Queer theory, Gender, Social norms, Rhetoric, Gender performativity

THE RHETORIC OF QUEER: SUBVERTING HETERONORMATIVE SOCIAL

INSTITUTIONS AND CREATING NEW MEANING

by

MARISSA NOLAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

THE RHETORIC OF QUEER: SUBVERTING HETERONORMATIVE SOCIAL

INSTITUTIONS AND CREATING NEW MEANING

by

MARISSA NOLAN

Committee Chair: Dr. George Pullman

Committee: Dr. Elizabeth Lopez

Dr. Melissa McLeod

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2013

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and friends. My husband, Collin, is owed the most thanks, as he is the one who has had to see me through the ups and downs of this project. An immense feeling of gratitude to my parents, who never stopped supporting me and helping me achieve all of my goals. My sister, Maribeth, deserves thanks as well for being such an amazing example for me as a friend, an academic, and a woman.

I would also like to dedicate this project to my incredible group of friends. Amy has been there to hear me go on about every single deadline and paper, and never once did she complain about my complaining. She my truest friend and I will love her for forever. Anna has been an unending source of reassurance, encouragement, and humor – thank you! Rachael has been an inspiration for me as the kind of person I want to become, especially in her work. She is my daily reminder that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing and that I will eventually get to where I want to be. Thanks to Phillip, Josh, and Robert who all made sure I never took myself too seriously, and offered plenty of opportunities for the occasional, much needed diversion.

There is no doubt in my mind that I would not be where I am without these people who have shown me nothing but love, care, and support. Thank you!

Acknowledgements

It is with immense appreciation and gratitude that I acknowledge the support and help of the members of my thesis committee, Dr. George Pullman, Dr. Elizabeth Lopez, and Dr. Melissa McLoed. Without their guidance and expertise this thesis would not have been possible.

Dr. Pullman has been a major influence on my writing since the beginning of graduate school. His expansive knowledge of ancient rhetoric was an invaluable resource for this project. Additionally, Dr. Pullman always challenged me to become a better writer, and for that I am incredibly thankful.

Dr. Lopez has been an inspiration since I came to Georgia State as an undergraduate. In fact, it was during my senior capstone course with her that I initially had the idea for this project. Dr. Lopez's dedication to the field of rhetoric and composition and her desire to always learn inspires me to do the same.

Finally, I owe many thanks to Dr. Melissa McLoed, who had the daunting task of trying to make learning practical grammar during a summer semester enjoyable. She definitely succeeded and I know that my writing has improved as a result.

Table of Contents

1   Introduction

The social etiquette that our society has imparted on the public has deemed conversations about sexual orientation too taboo to be part of mainstream discussions. When terms like "queer," "gay," and "same sex" are used, people tend to become uncomfortable. Some individuals take it as a personal affront when others do not behave or dress in the ways that larger society has outlined as acceptable for each designated gender. When social norms -- how to dress, what haircut to sport, who to hold hands with in public – are violated, not only is the person who is not abiding by these social laws affected, but so are those who are witnesses to the violation of the norms and the social norms themselves.

The motivation behind this research lies in the belief that through opposing and disregarding the social norms that dictate acceptable behavior for those operating within larger society, those doing the opposing, or queering, can actually develop new space where they can create new meaning for themselves. Over time, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, the prescribed norms will eventually change or disappear entirely.

"Queer" describes members of sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual, heteronormative, or gender-binary. These individuals operate outside the socially accepted, heteronormative constructs that dictate how one can dress and act in regard to his or her ascribed gender. Someone who is queer possesses a biological sex, either male, female, or intersexed; however, that person may or may not identify with the gender that is socially assigned to that sex, or that person may deliberately choose to identify with a gender that is opposite of the one that is socially assigned to his or her biological sex. The idea is that queer individuals are queer exactly because they do not identify with what society expects.

For the purposes of this project, to "queer" pertains to actions that undermine socially constructed and accepted gender conventions. Anything that does not identify with these norms

is queering them. Queering is the intentional act that involves a person purposefully not identifying, acting, dressing, or behaving in ways considered to be in line with the gender associated with a person's original biological sex. The act of queering is entirely intentional. Each and every person who lives within any given society has at least some indication of what are and are not the accepted norms and conventions of that society. To decide to behave or act in ways that are incongruent with society's norms is a deliberate act of queering. This is not to suppose that the impulse to queer is entirely voluntary; sexual orientation and gender identification are not clear choices for some individuals. But the decision to act on the involuntary impulses is intentional, making the act of queering an intentional one.

To queer socially accepted norms and conventions does not necessitate homosexuality; however, homosexual people can and do queer socially accepted conventions. Take, for example, the notions behind traditional relationships and marriage. The dynamics of homosexual relationships completely undermine what our society has decided an acceptable marriage should look like. In other words, not everyone who queers social conventions is gay, but all gay people queer social conventions.

In order to stay true to the rhetorical foundation of this research, it is necessary to define significant key terms. Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. Traditionally, rhetoric is the art of speaking and writing effectively to achieve a certain goal; however, rhetoric also encompasses our behavior and actions that work to achieve particular objectives. Rhetoric is a discourse that involves how we invent arguments and then deliver them in ways so that they can be as effective as possible. For instance, the ways in which each person is who he or she are is how he or she decides to present himself or herself to the rest of the world is a form of rhetoric.

The phrase "a rhetoric of…" signifies a certain kind of language, expectations, and behaviors associated with particular people, events, schools of thought, etc. Scholars from a vast array of disciplines apply this phrase to many topics, both academic and non-academic. By saying

there is a rhetoric of something, researchers can identify a group of people, an event, a process, basically anything that possesses a specialized set of norms, conventions, and jargon, and then report on how the people within that group interact with and interpret happenings both within and outside the group. Therefore, by suggesting that there is a rhetoric of queer, I assert that there exists something that encompasses a group of people and processes that subvert social conventions by queering them in ways that change both the person doing the queering and the convention being queered, and by doing so, the people doing the queering bring new meaning to themselves and to the social conventions. The act of queering is an intentional response to the social institutions that aim to dictate how individuals should look and behave. These acts lend themselves to be read from a rhetorical perspective where notions like invention and delivery come into play.

Queering social conventions is a rhetorical act. Choosing to abide or to not abide by social conventions represents invention – as in having the initial ideas to subvert the conventions – and it is then delivery when the convention is queered and the person doing the queering presents him or herself to the rest of society. The people who are doing the queering are basically delivering their argument, or presenting to the rest of society either how they see themselves or how they wish to be seen. The consequences of queering can be both positive and negative. Individuals who are queering the social conventions can potentially experience ridicule, criticism, and ostracism from individuals or groups who identify with the heteronormative side of society. In her text, *In a Queer Time and Place*, Judith (J. Jack) Halberstam discusses two specific instances that involve people who queered social conventions, which ultimately lead to their tragic ends at the hands of those who felt threatened by their queering.

There can be more positive outcomes as well. When enough people decide to queer a social convention, the convention itself becomes less important and those queering can begin to experience more freedom within larger society, perhaps without ridicule, criticism, and ostracism. For instance, compared to a hundred years ago, society is much more accepting of women

wearing pants or other articles of clothing that would have then been considered too masculine for women to wear. Further, over time, there is the potential for the social convention to be changed in ways that are more inclusive of people who choose not to live within the constrains of heteronormative social norms. This evolution of norms and conventions has happened numerous times over the years. Some of the most prominent examples include the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and civil rights. All of these represent times in history when minority groups opposed popular opinion, resulting in a significant change in what were then the current socially accepted norms.

Popular opinion regarding homosexuality and queering commonly accepted social norms is experiencing changes, albeit slow coming. In the United States, nine states have legalized gay marriage, and popular media has played a large part in helping sway society's perceptions of queerness. For instance, in the past fifteen years or so, several television programs have involved plot lines and characters that queer social norms, and they have experienced tremendous success. *Will & Grace*, a program featured on NBC beginning in 1998 and airing for eight seasons, is probably the single most successful television show that featured gay principal characters. The lead gay roles both identified with and opposed gay stereotypes: one gay male character was a successful attorney who would otherwise seem heterosexual, while another gay male character portrays the more flamboyant, colorful qualities that are more stereotypical of gay men.

Another television program that is starting to amass a large following is NBC's *The New Normal*. This show follows an openly gay couple that is interested in starting a family. In order to do so, they hire a surrogate to carry their child for them. The characters in the show encounter several obstacles, including public ridicule, because of the lifestyles they have chosen and decisions they make. The main message of the show can be summed up neatly by the programs title: there is a new kind of "normal," or the notion that there is a "normal" is becoming obsolete. This is a topic that J. Jack (Judith) Halberstam also addresses this topic in her new text *Gaga*

Feminism. She argues that the notion of what constitutes "normal" is fluid and in constant change; public opinion about what makes up a "family" is transitioning. In all, it is important to recognize that the trials and tribulations that the people Halberstam talks about in her book and the characters in these television programs endure all shape how they behave, whether in line with social constructions or not. It is important to note again that while these television programs portray homosexual lifestyles, it is not simply because the characters are gay that the shows are relevant examples of queering; the two are not always necessarily tied. However, since these lifestyles are not exactly in line with popular norms that dictate relationships, they are queering the norms.

It is my position that the ways each of us perform our gender should be considered rhetorical performances, our different ways of situating ourselves among the rest of society. We deliver how we perceive ourselves to the surrounding world through the ways we dress, the language we use, and the lifestyles we choose to live. There are those who live their lives congruently with norms and mores that society outlines for us – dressing according to ascribed gender, being in heterosexual relationships, etc. – and for the most part society leaves these individuals alone. For those who choose not to live according to what society deems acceptable, to subvert those conventions imposed on the public by society, there is a greater risk of ridicule, ostracism, and sometimes a significant difference in legal rights.

However, there is an interesting – and generally overlooked – occurrence that happens when socially constructed, heteronormative norms are subverted: the individuals doing the subverting – who should be experiencing significant limitations as a consequence of their actions – actually find they have more room to make new meaning of the route they have chosen. Consider cross dressing: the biological female who chooses not to dress like a woman today has exponentially more opportunities to dress however she wants because she is queering the social convention of how society expects her to dress. If she is already choosing to ignore the conven-

tion and not dress in the ways society tells her she should, she can then dress as she pleases because she will already not be identifying with the conventions.

J. Jack Halberstam makes a similar argument in *Gaga Feminism*. When discussing the end of "normal," she states, " I am trying to show that once you stray from representational modes dependent upon human forms and all the cliché-ridden formulae that they entail, surprisingly new narratives of life, love, and intimacy are bound to appear" (67). She goes on to suggest that the social conventions that our domestic culture has relied upon to dictate what it means to be "male," "female," "normal," or "family" are really just placeholders that we cling to for security; they hold no intrinsic value. In her opinion, feminist and queer theories should not necessarily try to fix the categories, nor try to change them to be more inclusive of the changes that happen daily, and instead should try to throw the categories out entirely. However, she notes that our society is not necessarily capable or ready for such a social revolution:

> Out in the mainstream marketplace of ideas, a place badly in need of old-fashioned as well as newfangled feminisms, best-selling books are still telling straight women how to get men and how to marry them, and telling men how and why they should become properly domesticated. (Halberstam 67)

Queering social conventions makes it possible to create new meaning for those who are queering and new meaning of the norms that are being queered, even to the point where the convention can be eventually erased and made irrelevant. The ways in which people are able to queer things are limitless. Language can be queered by using, or not using, gendered pronouns to refer to people belonging to each biological sex group. It all relates back to the notion of gender performativity, or "doing" gender. This idea comes from Judith Butler's text, *Gender Trouble*. Gender performativity lends itself to the interpretation of delivery from a rhetorical perspective. It is also important to note that individuals need not be homosexual in order to queer social conventions. For instance, heterosexual couples who choose to live together and raise children

without being legally married go against what society has deemed acceptable for such living situations.

In the sections to come, I will argue that instead of pigeonholing themselves by subverting socially constructed, heteronormative norms, individuals choosing to operate outside social conventions can actually create new and different meanings of the conventions for themselves. The next section will examine the foundations of rhetorical training and the ways in which young men would shape and develop their public identity through training in rhetoric in accordance to the accepted social norms of the time and location. Next, I will explore the theories behind social norms, their construction, why they are so important to us as a culture, and why it is such an ordeal when they are subverted or not followed. These notions lead into the next chapter, which will address and investigate what it means to queer things, whether queering something is intentional or not, and why it matters. Finally, all of this research will culminate in a final section that will introduce the rhetoric of queer. This section will discuss language use, rhetorical elements of queering – invention, delivery, etc -, and gender performativity.

2   Ancient Rhetoric & "Making Men"

Socially constructed norms that outline preferred and acceptable behavior have been alive and well for thousands of years. The inhabitants of ancient Greece and Rome were no strangers to both explicit and implied social rules that governed what they should wear, who they should associate with in public, and even the pitch they should use when speaking aloud. However, some of the most notable norms of this time period dealt with common perceptions of gender, especially when it came to raising young men.

Formal training in rhetorical studies was a privilege reserved for only the male children of elite families. Men or boys with origins in the working class or below and women were entirely shut out from any kind of formal education. In the introduction to her book, *Making Men*, Maud Gleason poses an insightful question about the hypocrisy of keeping women away from schooling in ancient times: "My interest in the sociology of elite education developed in response to a demoralizing paradox of my own education: how can the elite university manage to incorporate itself as a meritocracy while excluding women from power?" (xii). Though the inequalities between men and women in academia are slowly disappearing, there is no question that gender norms and stereotypes still weigh heavily in favor of the heteronormative men's perspectives. It would have seemed safe to assume that more progress would have been made over the past couple thousands of years since ancient Grecian and Roman times, but alas, women are still actively fighting today for equal pay for equal work. The current state of our society is actually rather similar to Gleason's impression of how things worked back then: "the ancient world was not a gender neutral place" (xiv). In other words, gender plays a significant role back then as it does today, and in both time periods the ways people manipulate gender has an impact on how they see themselves as well as how others see them.

However, in order to properly analyze the ways in which social norms impact life today, it is crucial to examine where notions like these may have originated. Further, for the sake of

this research, it is vital to examine how gender was treated in ancient Greece and Rome, and ask questions to determine what role rhetoric played in creating and maintaining gender systems. This is important because this was also the birthplace of rhetoric and where the notions of developing one's identity through rhetoric first began. When thinking about these ideas, several questions crop up: what did it mean to be a "man" and a "woman" in ancient Greece and Rome? How was gender structured? What kind of impact did gender roles have on people's day-to-day life?

Maud Gleason argues that all "human societies tend to organize gender differences into kinesthetic systems for communication and display. One has to learn to move like a gendered human body" (*Making Men* xxvi). As previously noted, ancient Rome and Greece were not exceptions to this; within those societies were norms that structured what it meant to be a man or a woman, but in these places at that point in history, only the males really possessed a gender that mattered, and these "men" had to have the qualifications that were truly manly in order to be acknowledged as such within their communities. A binary gender system similar to the one that is prominent in our society today was in effect in ancient Rome and Greece, but there were also degrees of masculinity and femininity that could either help or hinder one's public gender identity.

In other words, "the essential idea here is that there exists masculine and feminine 'types' that do not necessarily correspond to the anatomical sex of the person in question" (Gleason 58). This idea is one of the reasons why a formal training in rhetoric often included a heavy emphasis on practicing avoiding mannerisms that would come off as feminine. In both ancient Rome and Greece, rhetoric played a significant role in socializing and developing young boys into what would be considered the "ideal" man, someone who would be a brilliant representation of all that their culture stood for. Gleason outlines this process as follows:

> The rhetorical performer embodied his civilization's ideal of cultivated manliness. The young men who consciously studied his rhetorical exempla unconsciously

imitated the gestalt of his self-presentation. The result was, for many generations, the smooth-flowing cultural reproduction of the patterns of speech, thought, and movement appropriate to a gentleman. (xxiv)

In a very important way, these kinds of practices were how cultural traditions and capital were upheld and passed on. Further, through this kind of traditional upbringing that only those from elite lineage experienced, these young men were able to develop their own public identities that they would then demonstrate through carefully practiced rhetorical declamations.

Though there was a sort of binary gender system in effect, the notion of having a gender from the moment of birth was not an idea that the ancient Greeks or Romans subscribed to. Instead, gender, and more specifically, "masculinity in the ancient world was an achieved state, radically underdetermined by anatomical sex" (Gleason 59). However, the process of achieving this state, did indeed begin in infancy, starting with molding and encouraging certain physical attributes. Greek physicians had practices of instructing nurses to poke, prod, pull, and swaddle infants in various ways and with diverse techniques in attempts to promote round heads, well-shaped noses, and the perfect hourglass shape for baby girls (Gleason 71).

These kind of customs were carried on through the branches of rhetorical training for baby boys:

The process of forging masculine deportment that could begin as early as infancy continued during literary education, when the linguistic mastery that was the exclusive prerogative of upper-class males was attained under pain of physical punishment at the hands of the *grammaticus* and under pain of social humiliation in the school of the rhetor (Gleason 72).

Once the rhetorical training would begin for these young boys, one of the most important lessons that they would be taught was to avoid imitating or showing any kind of characteristic or quality that was usually reserved for women, or that would make them seem effeminate.

Gleason makes a point to list several of the most significant rhetorical teachers of the time, like Quintilian, and the specific mannerisms and characteristics that they forbid their pupils to use. Some of these included: tilting one's head to one side, shifting one's gaze, carrying one's hands with palms turned upwards, melting glances, and rapid eye movement. These qualities or gestures were generally avoided by young men because they were thought to make them seem more feminine, which was the absolute worst thing a young rhetorician could do.

According to Gleason, the common thought in the ancient world that men were superior to women was not always exactly explicit; many times these kinds of sentiments come through in the teachings of what young men should *not* do, like the list above, so they would not seem womanly, or effeminate. In fact, on the other end of the spectrum, women or eunuchs (men who do not possess the physical attributes that necessitate manliness) were shamed and ridiculed when they came off as trying to be more masculine than society wanted them to be:

> Since the secondary sex characteristics (particularly the hair and the voice) are "read" socially as signs of the inner heat that constitutes a man's claim to physiological and cultural superiority over women, eunuchs, and children, those who tampered with the most visible variables of masculinity in their self-presentation provoked vehement moral criticism because they were rightly suspected of undermining the symbolic language in which male privilege was written. (Gleason 70)

Through this reasoning it seems clear that both ends of the spectrum would be held in contempt if socially constructed norms that governed gender were not observed accurately.

Women maintained a significantly inferior position than men did in ancient Rome and Greece: young women were not afforded the same access to education that young men were, and when the men were trained to speak publicly, they were repeatedly warned to avoid feminine traits because they would cause the audience to believe they were less manly. In fact, some rhetorical scholars of the time strongly suggested that men should never learn to speak as equals

with women for fear that some of the femininity from the woman would somehow rub off on the man. Gleason outlines this common thought at follows:

> Intimacy with a woman on equal terms affect both the manner and the matter of his speech: "And if he talks, all he will be able to talk about is weaving and wool, since his tongue has been *discolored* by the quality of women's speech." (100)

It is interesting here that there was less of a concern for the woman to pick up any hints of masculine speech, though perhaps this is because women were already always consider the lesser sex, so a common assumption would probably have been that the woman would not be intelligent enough to do so. Even further, there was no expectation for women to cultivate the skill of public speaking in the first place.

The scholarship available about how society was conducted in ancient Rome and Greece clearly outlines gender norms that aimed to keep women in an inferior position to men at all times, but especially in academic arenas like rhetoric. In *Making Men*, Maud Gleason sums up this notion, saying, "In a value system that prized rhetorical skill as the quintessential human excellence, and in a society structured so that this perfection could be achieved only by adult males, arbiters of rhetoric were also arbiters of masculine deportment" (104). In other words, those who succeeded in rhetoric were prized possessions that were highly valued in those cultures and the only ones allowed admittance were males from elite social classes, making the pool of potential candidates incredibly narrow. Unfortunately, as previously noted, though there has been progress for women since then, women are still struggling to find equality with men in social and workplace situations.

This last point is pointedly significant because of the socially constructed nature of gender itself, even thousands of years ago in the ancient world. How is it that, as thoughtful and high-functioning humans working in societies, we continue to construct systems of norms, like gender, that maintain such inequality? The next section focuses on these kinds of questions and

takes a look at norms through a sociological perspective to examine how the norms are produced and maintained in society, and to what or who's purpose they ultimately serve.

3   Sociological Perspective

Societies and cultures across the globe are all defined and governed by understood norms. These norms are drastically different from culture to culture, from one side of the world to the other. The smallest native tribes in Papua, New Guinea can have their own sets of norms that are entirely separate from the larger societies living in areas in nearby Indonesia or neighboring Australia. Customs that would seem perfectly natural to those living in the United States may be offensive or ludicrous to people living in Northern Africa.

Sociologists have long debated how norms emerge, how they change, and why or whether they influence a person's behavior. Some important questions that crop up when discussing norms include: how do norms play a role in day-to-day life? How do norms contribute to how people shape the way they see themselves as members of a given society? There are no straight forward, plain answers to these questions; however, this section aims to examine the different theories and perspectives regarding this topic that have been proposed by leading scholars in sociology, and to try to make connections between the theories behind social norms, the accompanying specialized rhetoric, and queering.

According to an article published by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* co-written by Cristina Bicchieri and Ryan Muldoon, social norms can be defined as customary rules that govern behavior in groups and societies (Bicchieri 1). The authors touch on a major assumption of social norms:

> It is unquestionably assumed that norms elicit conformity, and that there is a strong correlation between people's normative beliefs and their behavior. By normative beliefs is usually meant individual or collective beliefs about what sort of behavior is prescribed (or proscribed) in a given social context. (Bicchieri 1)

The authors go on to explain that, for the most part, norms come paired with a degree of expectation for others in the given group, community, or society to also abide by the norms. In fact,

the notion of collective expectations of action is one of the few things that the assorted theories do agree on. Contemporary sociology acknowledges three prominent theories regarding the creation and maintenance of social norms: 1) the theory of the socialized actor, 2) theory of social identity, and 3) theory of rational choice.

The theory of the socialized actor, posited mainly by Talcott Parsons, suggests that an individual acts based on choices among several alternatives. The literature goes on to propose that norms influence daily behavior and actions because they have been instilled in people since birth, generally through their parents or other family members. Bicchieri and Muldoon outline Parson's theory, stating, "Conformity to standing norms is a stable acquired disposition that is independent of the consequences of conformity. Through repeated socialization, individuals come to learn and internalize the common values embodied in the norms" (1). Parsons believes that these socialized actors act "according to roles that define their self-identity and behavior" (Bicchieri 1).

While this perspective seems logical and points out how people become acquainted with the norms at a very early age, it does not explain how the norms get started in the first place. Further, this kind of theory is difficult to prove or observe in larger society because there may not be a strong relation between what people claim they should do and what they in fact do.

Social identity theory is the second theory of social norms that is widely accepted. Bicchieri and Muldoon define this approach as follows:

> By "social identity" we refer, in Tajfel's own words, to "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. ([Tajfel 255] 1)

In other words, individuals attach their identity and value to that of a larger group. Therefore, norms, while they are not behavior in and of themselves, are common attitudes about how people in the group should behave. The authors suggest that by complying with the implied norms

supported by one's group or society, a person is demonstrating his or her allegiance and good standing within the group, which then allows for that person to reap the positive benefits of being a group member.

One of the biggest differences between social identity theory and the theory of the socialized actor is the former does not claim that norms need to be internalized in order to affect action among individuals. In fact, in the theory of social identity, it makes more sense that a person would behave congruently with the accepted social norms in order to create or to maintain whatever identity he or she desired instead of abiding by any norm for the sake of the norm itself. This notion brings about an interesting perspective to look at how norms change.

According to the theory of social identity, an individual would be compelled to act in compliance with norms in order to fulfill an image of some societal identity, not because the norms are part of an internalized psyche that has been developed since infancy. If that is the case, then new norms can emerge and be accepted by society simply through a combination of change in popular opinion and external pressures. Bicchieri and Muldoon give the example of the image of the ideal man in the fifties:

> In those years a popular icon was a Humphrey Bogart type that, among other things, was never observed without a cigarette in his mouth. Now it means leading a healthy lifestyle that may include running, vegetarianism, and abstinence from drinking and smoking. (1)

The same could be said about women's roles, which have also changed dramatically over the past six years. Both of these examples, along with many more adequately demonstrate the fluidity of social norms and customs.

The theory of rational choice, last of the prominent theories addressing social norms, maintains that "since norms are upheld by sanctions, compliance is a utility-maximizing strategy. Provided that conformity to a norm attracts approval and transgression disapproval, con-

forming is the rational thing to do, since nobody willfully attracts discredit and punishment" (Bicchieri 1).

While all of these theories go into detail about how and why people may abide by social norms, none of them really address how the norms emerge in the first place. Bicchieri aims to address this by positing that there are three ways in which norms emerge: 1) biologically, 2) cognitively, and 3) through structured interactions. The first makes sense when discussing small, incredibly tight-knit groups, like the isolated tribes of Papua, New Guinea; community members would somehow biologically share instincts that they would then transform into commonly held and accepted norms. Unfortunately, this approach does not account for norms in larger communities or societies where not everyone is familiar with one another. The second perspective, the cognitive approach, suggests that norms emerge after repeated interactions between people – defectors, punishers, and non-punishers - which would result in conditional, unstructured strategies that would ultimately translate into social norms. The last theory, the structured interaction approach, argues that social norms emerge from simple cognitive processes - like imitation - and structured interactions. In other words, norms compete and evolve based on which ones are easiest to abide by and have best benefits (Bicchieri 1).

All of these theories about how social norms materialize and are maintained have at least one thing in common: there is always a degree of expectation. This can come in the form of society's expectations of how its constituents should behave, or how individuals expect their peers to act, or how people believe society expects them to conduct themselves. Here is the point where acts of queering social norms complicates things. In her discussion of Parsonian norms, Bicchieri suggest that some norms are so internalized that it is not until they are violated, or queered, that their existence is realized (1). Some of the norms that dictate how ascribed genders should act belong in this "internalized" category.

Although norms may be so ingrained in the subconscious of society and continue to persevere from generation to generation, that does not always mean that they are always well liked.

Bicchieri and Muldoon state, "Moreover, though a particular norm may persist (as opposed to emerge) because of some [perceived] positive social function it fulfills, there are many others that are inefficient and even widely unpopular" (1). This last statement rings true of many of the current norms that aim to constrain how people express gender, who they want to marry, and what kinds of families they want to have. Due to their ingrained and sometimes subconscious nature, norms have the propensity to shape the way we as individuals develop our self-images, whether it be in compliance with the dictations of the norms or not. Unfortunately for these people who feel as though the norms do not adequately or accurately encompass how they see themselves, the only choices they have are to try to fit into molds that do not represent them well, or queer them.

However, as we have seen in this section and will continue to see in those following, social norms do have the capacity to change and, in many instances, they have changed over an extended period of time. Earlier, in the discussion of rational choice, a particular quotation stated, "nobody willfully attracts discredit and punishment" (Bicchieri 1). However, in some instances of gender queering or queering other social norms, the act of queering itself is the only way to challenge the norm in hopes of eventually changing the norm or abolishing it entirely, and most of the time, these deliberate acts of opposition attract discredit and punishment.

In terms of changing norms, Bicchieri takes quite a logical and apparently simple position. She argues that over time "each instance of strategy adjustment represents a new generation of agents coming into the population, with the old generation dying simultaneously" (Bicchieri 1). This seems to be the path that most socially constructed norms take: one generation has a certain take on a particular topic, then their children grow up hearing their parents opinions, and while some of them adopt everything they hear, others rebel to some degree, and changes in popular opinion begin. One specific example of this includes the increased acceptance of visible tattoos on people in careers where once a "professional" appearance absolutely did not include tattoos. The same could be said about gay and lesbian relationships; over the

past couple decades, popular media has begun to portray gay and lesbian relationships during primetime hours, serving as a sort of exposure therapy for those of the population who maintained staunch positions against such lifestyles.

After discussing how sociology defines norms, the competing theories of how social norms function within society, and how expectations in regards to norms are not always met (specifically when they are queered), the last item left to address is the rhetorical aspect of social norms. Talcott Parsons argues in his theory of the socialized actor that the norms people within a given culture abide by are only effective and influential because they are internalized to the point that people do not even realize that they are acting in accordance to them. From a rhetorical standpoint, this internalization is considered the ultimate rhetorical achievement: having individuals act in a certain way and having them believe they are doing it by their own decision. In Parson's formulation, the methods by which norms are internalized and persist over time is due to effective argumentation, or efficient rhetoric. In terms of gender, Judith Butler makes a relevant point in regards to gender as one of Talcott Parson's internalized norms:

> Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (*Gender Trouble* 190)

This section, focusing on what social norms are and how they function in society, is necessary because it predicates the foundation for the following discussion about queer theory and the ways people queer these social norms to achieve new and different meaning for themselves and for the norm. In order to fully grasp why people get up in arms when tightly held norms are queered, it is necessary to cover the basis on which the norms are established and embedded within society's collective psyche.

4   Queer Theory & Queering

Queer theory and the notions of "queering" emerge from a branch of feminism and gender studies that focus on marginalized groups composed of individuals who queer socially constructed norms and institutionalized ideals imposed on the larger public. These norms dictate acceptable behavior based on ascribed gender. Many scholars -- Judith Butler, J. Jack Halberstam, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and others -- have published regarding the ways in which some people decide to subvert --or queer -- socially accepted norms and what happens to them and to the norms themselves when they are queered. Some of the questions that queer theory aims to answer include: what does it mean to be masculine or feminine? In what ways are these categories culturally based? How do socially constructed institutions dictate the ways people should dress, speak, and act? What happens when people do not abide by these socially constructed rules? What, if anything, happens to the individual who is queering? Are they accepted, ostracized, or ignored? Do the social conventions ever change? Will they ultimately disappear?

In her latest book, *Gaga Feminism*, J. Jack Halberstam asks similar questions. She intends to figure out what would happen if more adults would be open to thinking about gender, sexual orientation, and the relationship that exists between the two the ways that children do. She asks:

> What if we gendered people according to their behavior? What if gender shifted over the course of a lifetime – what if someone began life as a boy but became a boygirl and then a boy/man? What if some males are ladies, some ladies are butch, some butches are women, some women are gay, some gays are feminine, some femmes are straight, and some straight people don't know what they hell is going on? … What if we actually started to notice the ways in which race and sexuality have become hopelessly entangled with notions of the normal and the perverse, so that we could see the ways in which the white family hide its secrets

behind thick layers of presumed normativity, while black families in particular

but also Latino and Muslim families are regularly cast as excessive or intolerant,

traditional and behind the times? (Halberstam 8)

The last section examined the implications of social norms and how they manage the daily actions of those operating in society. However, while it is important to realize that these norms really do exist, even more importantly, it is essential to acknowledge that they are, in fact, socially constructed, and therefore do indeed change and adapt over time.

It is also important to note that it is not only queer people who have the ability to queer social norms. Feminism, read through gender studies and queer theory lenses, is entirely about women's position in an inherently patriarchal society and how they have challenged the socially constructed norms that once stood in their way. Some pertinent scholarship on this topic comes from the field of psychology, compliments of Michael Conway and Lenny R. Vartanian and their co-written piece, "A Status Account of Gender Stereotypes: Beyond Communality and Agency." In this article, the authors argue that on two levels – gender and status – women's stereotypes are associated with communality and men's with agency.

In the report of their findings, Conway and Vartanian conclude that women are perceived as having lower status than men, thus having less agency mainly due to their high verbal passive-aggressiveness, a topic that will be addressed again later. They posit that because of the way society has built gender stereotypes, if a man were to be whiny and nagging like women can sometime be perceived, it would not be dubbed whiny and nagging simply because they are men. Instead, their whiny nags are perceived as legitimate statements of complaint that warrant action; they are merely exhibiting their agency, whereas women would be perceived as passive aggressive for the same actions.

The authors also outline the ways that women are reconfiguring their social roles through status – as women climb the status ladder, approaching men in terms of careers, educa-

tion, and salary, they are changing the way they perceive themselves and in turn, the way society perceives them.

Though it is clear that the status of women is changing, I would alter the vocabulary to rethink this last idea. I would argue that some women, even heterosexual women, have the capacity to queer the social institutions that suppress them, keeping them below men in terms of status. By queering their roles, they open them up for new meanings to come in and change things, including their identity. I would argue that the changes in social status that women have seen over the past decades is primarily due to their changing and subverting the social conventions and norms that they were expected to operate within. By deciding to do something different, to make new meaning to their roles, women changed how they were seen, a transformation that ultimately allowed them to realize new kinds of identities for themselves.

There are so many examples of these kinds of changes in identities for women: working outside of the house, earning academic degrees, women's suffrage, wearing pants and showing skin, and even choosing to have children without a husband, or an actual, physical male for that matter. All of these represent the ways that women decided to change how they see themselves, the modifications they made to the social norms and institutions that told them how to act and what to wear, resulting in their being able to change their own identities in the end. But it is not only women who can do this; by queering those institutions that mandate a certain look or action, anyone can create opportunities to make new meanings and new identities for themselves.

J. Jack Halberstam also speaks to this topic of notable changes in our society that have altered the interpretations of gender over the past several years in *Gaga Feminism*. She notes:

> Just to name a few of the most obvious changes that have impacted our daily experiences of sex and gender, in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, we have seen a massive decline in the prevalence and dominance of monogamous marriage and huge rise in divorce and diverse households. In the United States, we have also witnessed a new and startling visibility of transgender

communities and individuals as well as new levels of acceptance for normative

gays and lesbians. Gay marriage is on the horizon and the homo-hetero binary

seems less definitive of sexual orientation than it did at the turn of the last cen-

tury. (Halberstam xix)

Halberstam's understanding of how the social institutions of marriage family have changed and

how the acceptance of "normative" gays and lesbians has increased is indicative of how popular

opinions are fluid and have the capacity to change over time. Changes like these happen when

groups or single individuals decide to live in ways that are not congruent with the socially ac-

cepted norms. Eventually, the norms change to adapt to the change people push for. Halberstam

ends one part of her discussion of modern family situations by offering her strong opinion about

changing the norms: "If we don't change the social structures we inherit, we are doomed to re-

peat them" (57).

This is not to say that social change through queering is without struggle or opposition.

In our society alone, there have been tragic instances of hatred and violence that have cost many

people their lives. In her text, *In a Queer Time & Place*, Halberstam investigates the outcomes of

such a crime, the execution-style murder of Brandon Teena and his two friends, Lisa Lambert

and Philip DeVine. This story specifically caught the attention of popular media because it was

"a young white person who had been born a woman, but who was living as a man and had been

dating local girls" (Halberstam 23). Unfortunately, some places -- for Halberstam it is rural,

predominately white, middle America – and groups of people find acts of queering to be direct

blows to their beliefs and ways of life. Halberstam argues that the social conventions that Bran-

don Teena queered threatened the common ideals of masculinity that were popular in the small

town of Falls City, Nebraska:

We might conclude that Brandon lived up to and even played into the romantic

ideals that his girlfriends cultivated about masculinity. Brandon's self-

presentation must be read, I believe, as a damaging critique of the white working-

class masculinities around him; at the same time, however, his performance of courtly masculinity is a shrewd deployment of the middle class and so-called respectable masculinities that represent an American romantic ideal of manhood. (28)

For the women he dated, how Brandon was able to queer the way he interpreted his own sexuality and present himself was appealing in a way that was notably different from the masculinities that the "actual" men in the area were able to portray. It was exactly this queering that ultimately threatened these "real" men enough to convince them to take violent action against Brandon and his friends.

An important element that should not be glossed over when thinking about queering socially constructed norms is the intentional acts that always exist in the background. It is impossible to live and to operate within any society without being aware of what is deemed acceptable for that particular culture. This is not to say that someone from one part of the world who is transplanted in an entirely different area will not experience some degree of culture shock, or that he or she would immediately know all of the intricate ins and outs of their new surroundings. However, if a person is brought up in a certain culture, it would be impossible for that person not to be aware of the social constructions that set the rules for acceptable behavior for its citizens.

It follows that if a person found him or herself to be queering said social constructions, it would be an entirely intentional action. The impulses behind the desire to be different, or at least different from what the social norms dictate from each ascribed gender may or may not be intentional, or even welcome, but the choice to act on the impulses is deliberate.

The acts of queering social constructions carry with them implications that go beyond affecting the person who is queering. In fact, queering has the capacity, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively, to resonate with people or groups of people not at all involved with the queering of norms. Take for instance, Christian fundamentalist groups that openly and

loudly announce their opinions against any kind of person or lifestyle that does not entirely mirror the heteronormative ideal they have developed through their interpretation of the Bible. The Westboro Baptist Church takes it even one step further by placing blame on other branches of Christianity for the existence and increased acceptability of gay marriage. For these extremists, by making the decisions to welcome gay, lesbian, and other less-heteronormative individuals into the folds of their churches, the Christians under attack are going against God's will and, therefore, exposing themselves and their followers to the possibility of being eternally damned (Bennett-Smith 1).

Through that instance alone, it is clear that some people hold onto their beliefs tightly; this group is willing to bash, berate, and damn to Hell other groups of Christians simply because they make decisions that they themselves would otherwise not make. Many of these views make their way into larger society via norms. However, there is a crucial aspect of social norms that cannot be overlooked: their ability to change – change themselves and those who are queering them- over time. Changes can happen in at least three different ways. First of all, by queering norms, those who are actively doing the queering necessitate a change in the norm. Secondly, when people queer norms, others see them differently, creating the possibility for their opinions to change, ergo providing more room for the norm to change. Lastly, over time, the norm can change beyond the point of recognition, or even disappear entirely. In other words, acts of queering can change socially constructed norms not just for those doing the queering, or even those who belong to the same communities as those who participate in queering, but for everyone.

The ways that the norms change today's cultures and in the near future will in turn inform the ways future norms will develop. As per human nature, people will always feel the compulsion to categorize themselves and others in attempts to make sense of everyone's position and function within society. It will always be because of this need to put people into groups that norms will always be a part of daily life for every society. As the chapter on the sociological per-

spective outlined, the mere existence of social norms is not inherently negative; many sociologists and anthropologists have made the argument that norms are essential for societies to maintain any semblance of social order. However, when individuals are criticized, ridiculed, and ostracized when they do not live their life according to these social rules, the consequences of these actions have harmful implications for those who are doing the queering.

Queer theory as a field of academic study is beginning to get below the surface of the ways in which socially constructed norms impact the everyday lives of queer people, the people who observe the norms being queered, and what happens to the norms themselves after being queered over time. So far, this section has shown that queer theory maintains that what society considers "feminine" and "masculine" are simply social constructions meant for people to be able to make sense of their position and the positions of those around them. Ironically, these social constructions that emerge to help make sense of society ultimately cause more tension and stress, and ergo more confusion as more and more people speak up about how these constraining and limited categories do not adequately fit the images that they have for themselves.

On one side, queering the norms serves to demonstrate that they are just social constructions that have virtually no value on their own. Conversely, there have also been many cases that exhibit the potential negative – and often times violent - implications that can come with queering norms; people have been hurt, physically and emotionally, but even those instances will go toward making changes in public opinion, hopefully changing the norm over time.

As aforementioned, queering these tightly held societal norms and conventions not only impacts the people doing the queering, but also those around them. Judith Halberstam brings this up again and again, specifically focusing on it in her work *Female Masculinity*. At first, the subject matter of the text, given away by its title, seems counterintuitive; according to popular opinion – to be female exactly means that one is not masculine. However, Halberstam makes the argument that this idea of female masculinity represents one of the many facets of gender, something she views as a range of interpretations and not a strict "one-or-the-other" choice.

This position makes many people uncomfortable, and Halberstam argues that female masculinity specifically threatens men's position in larger society. Western society has done a seamless job of making men's masculinity the dominant one with all other forms of masculinity becoming subordinated and made less acceptable.

For Halberstam, as prepubescent children, our ideas of gender fluctuates. This is not to say that society does not do its best to tell little boys and girls how to act, dress, and speak. Gender queering at a young age is generally ignored or brushed under the rug with the idea that the child will one day grow out of the "phase," like, for instance, little girls who are labeled "tomboys." In this case Halberstam argues:

> We could say that tomboysim is tolerated as long as the child remains prepubescent; as soon as puberty begins, however, the full force of gender conformity descends on the girl. [...] It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into complaint forms of femininity.
> (*Female Masculinity* 6)

There is no doubt that society does its best to make sure that every person maintains the attributes that make females "girls/women" and males "boys/men," but it is becoming more apparent that the gender binary system in effect is not only outdated but fundamentally flawed.

This project argues that the only way that customs and societal norms are effectively changed is direct opposition, people taking stances that challenge popular opinion. Halberstam concurs, but in a slightly different way:

> I want to carefully produce a model of female masculinity that remarks on its multiple forms but also calls for new and self-conscious affirmations of different gender taxonomies. Such affirmations begin not by subverting masculine power or taking up a position against masculine power but by turning a blind eye to conventional masculinities and refusing to engage. (*Female Masculinity* 9)

While this approach seems a little more passive, it does offer a method of change that would be effective. She goes on to suggest that one of the only reasons that our gender binary system has been sustained over the years is because of how female masculinity threatens men's masculinity. But I would argue that while female masculinity does directly threaten the kind of masculinity men believe should be reserved only for them, it equally threatens women's position in society: if masculine females become socially acceptable, where will that leave feminine females? How should feminine females act toward masculine females?

Halberstam brings this point to the forefront when in her discussion of public restrooms. She states, "In pubic bathrooms for women, various bathroom users tend to fail to measure up to expectations of femininity, and those of us who present in some ambiguous way are routinely questioned and challenged about our presence in the "wrong" bathroom" (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 20). The mere existence of the distinct bathrooms is in and of itself an obvious indicator of the gender binary system we live by. Individuals have two choices: the men's room, or the ladies' room. Sometimes places will offer a "family" bathroom, but the image that accompanies the stall is almost always the stick figure woman in triangle dress holding a smaller stick figure's hand, which implies another societal norm of what "family" is. But back to the two bathroom choices, if I am a masculine female who queers gender in the ways that I dress so that most people may perceive my outward appearance as more manly, what bathroom do I get to choose? Perhaps I will get less flack if I use the men's bathroom, but who is to say that just because I am more masculine than feminine I do not still identify as a woman, and therefore want to use the women's bathroom?

On this topic, Halberstam makes two points:

> 1) "If we use the paradigm of the bathroom as a limit of gender identification, we can measure the distance between binary gender schema and lived multiple gendered experiences"

2) "Either we need open-access bathrooms or multigendered bathrooms, or we need wider parameters for gender identification. The bathroom, as we know it, actually represents the crumbling edifice of gender in the twentieth century" (*Female Masculinity* 23-24).

These points are pertinent to the overall theme of queering gender because they touch on how seemingly unnoticeable ways society constructs how we operate daily, even down to how choosing what public restroom to use forces us to make one-or-the-other decisions about our own identity that we may not be comfortable making. Further, the second point demonstrates how something as basic as the lack of multigendered bathrooms or the over-adoption of single-gendered bathrooms can begin the conversation of trying to deconstruct social norms that constrain the ways that people are supposed to develop their personal identities.

5   The Rhetoric of Queer

"Here and now, our reality is being rescripted, reshot, reimagined, and if you

don't go gaga soon, you may wake up and find that you have missed the future and be-

come the past"

–   J. Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism*

The rhetoric of queer presented in this section builds on the notions of queer theory examined in the previous chapter. To review, "a rhetoric of..." as it is used for this research suggests that there exists a set of tenets regarding a group of people and processes that subvert social norms by queering them in ways that changes both the one queering and the norm that is being queered. In its most basic form, a rhetoric of queer maintains three main principles: 1) by subverting, or queering, social norms, those who are committing these acts of queering essentially create new meaning of those norms for themselves, 2) the ideas behind social norms as they relate to gender and the ways people interact with and negotiate with them have evident rhetorical elements, and 3) that social norms shape the ways we see ourselves and even have implications for how we use rhetoric and communicate with one another.

To be clear, the way that rhetoric is being used for the purposes of this research is grounded in the customary canons of rhetoric, specifically the three of invention, style, and delivery. By tradition, rhetoric is the art of speaking and writing effectively in an attempt to reach an objective, yet it also addresses the ways that behavior can create and execute arguments for particular purposes, for instance, as represented via acts of queering. Merriam-Webster defines the queer, in the adjective form, as "questionable, suspicious; differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal; eccentric, unconventional; mildly insane," and, in the transitive verb

form, "to spoil the effect or success of; to put or get into an embarrassing or disadvantageous situation" (1). This research will only adopt one of these, seeing as how the overwhelming majority of the definitions are tremendously negative in connotation. Therefore, for this work, queer will be defined generally as a verb meaning to undermine socially constructed and accepted gender conventions. In one of her books, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Judith Halberstam states, "'queer' refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (6).

An important term that she used in her definition is "nonnormative," suggesting that the ways that norms function within society make it seems as though there are ways to operate that are "normal," and, more often than not, *heteronormative*, meaning that the image of an ideal life would include heterosexual people, couples, and family structures while excluding all of the other kinds of variations to these constructions that exist. Halberstam addresses this exact point in her *In a Queer Time & Place* text as well:

> Obviously not all gay, lesbian and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space. (2)

In this statement, Halberstam argues that counter to the Merriam-Webster definition of queer, not every homosexual individual aims to be eccentric or to reverse social norms. Further, the ability to queer social norms is not a privilege for only gay, lesbian, and transgendered people; straight people can queer norms just as easily simply by not abiding what society has deemed acceptable. Some specific examples of how norms can be queered will be investigated later on in this chapter.

J. Jack Halberstam outlines the first principle beautifully in her text, *Gaga Feminism*:

> New affiliations between bodies, sex, and power remind us that the categories of
>
> being that seemed to specify and define human nature over one hundred years
>
> ago have quickly become rather inadequate placeholders for identity. While
>
> "male" and "female" are categories crumbling under the weight of revision [...].
>
> Rather than fixing these categories and institutions, feminist and queer theory
>
> should be giving them a good shove into the muck. (67)

The ideals and notions that the social norms prescribe and proscribe for each and every person no longer work for the kinds of identities people are creating for themselves. They are outdated. They do not represent all of the variations of gender that people have developed and continue to develop everyday. The ways that people can queer social norms are endless, and as mentioned earlier, acts of queering are not at all limited to members of the gay and lesbian communities.

Halberstam cites Judith Butler and Michele Foucault in her discussion of queering norms, stating, "Foucault, and Butler for that matter, clearly believe that resistance has to go beyond the taking of a name ('I am a lesbian'), and must produce creative new forms of being by assuming and empowering a marginal positionality" (53). She is using these prominent scholars in the field of feminist and queer theories to support the idea that through queering, or "resistance" as she coins it, individuals who find themselves in a marginalized position need to turn that position on its head, reclaim it, and make a new meaning of it for themselves. She goes on to say, "Accordingly, we should take over the prerogative of naming our experience and identifications" (Halberstam 53). This is exactly the point of queering: allowing people who live outside the boundaries of the accepted social norms to eliminate the power that the norms have over them, take the wind out of the sails of the negative opposition that aims to squash them, and either remake the norms in ways that encompass them, or destroy the norms altogether.

The ways that people can queer socially constructed norms are truly endless. All it takes is a person not acting in one hundred percent compliance with the rules that the social norm dictates for individuals' behavior. One example that J. Halberstam investigates at length in her

text *Gaga Feminism* is the institution of marriage. Initially she uses this example to demonstrate how norms and socially constructed norms change over time, arguing that young people are growing up in societies where divorce is just a common as staying together, and people are looking for different kinds of family structures that could potentially fit better for them. As for the children who are raised in these atypical family units, Halberstam states, "it is this generation of kids – kids growing up in the age of divorce, queer parenting, and economic collapse – who will probably recognize, name, and embrace new modes of gender and sexuality within a social environment that has changed their meaning forever" (*Gaga Feminism* xxi). In her approach, Halberstam suggests that perhaps by queering the social norms in one area – like marriage and parental strategies – it could lead to changes in people themselves who would then been more open to and engaged with changing the current social norms.

Halberstam continues the argument that children raised in the current social environment that is less reticent toward atypical family units have a greater chance of being more open toward varied situations than people of earlier generations. She furthers this train of thought by suggesting that today's young people who are raised in such family structures "might learn about gendered forms of power untethered to gender hierarchies" (Halberstam 58). In other words, the next generation will be better equipped and more willing to create and embrace new ways of interpreting and expressing gender, if notions of gender still exist at all.

Halberstam makes a similar point later in the text using the popular animated children's movie, *Finding Nemo*. In the story, a character named Dory, interestingly voiced by Ellen DeGeneres, a famous daytime talk host who is also an out and proud lesbian, as described by Halberstam, is the "forgetful fish who can only remember things for five minutes […], is able to find the missing Nemo, navigate the way across the Pacific, speak whale, and lead a fish uprising against fisherman" (*Gaga Feminism* 128). In her adventures with Marlon, Nemo's father, trying to find the little fish in the big, big ocean, Dory's character is set as the presumed romantic opposite of him, yet the relationship never comes to fruition. Halberstam draws an interesting

conclusion about this, and turns it into a message for the rest of us: "She [Dory] literally forgets family, forgets to get married, forgets to become a mother, and in the process opens herself up to a new way of being. I suggest we do the same" (*Gaga Feminism* 129). Clearly the probability of the general public one day "forgetting" to get married and uphold the heteronormative, nuclear family units that are all too familiar is slim, but that does not mean that it is impossible for us try to do what Halberstam proposes and try to be more welcoming of change.

As aforementioned, it is not just social institutions that can be rhetorically altered through acts of queering. More basic, foundational norms, like gender, can be queered as well. Judith Butler maintains in her text, *Gender Trouble*, the following position regarding the topic of a socially constructed binary gender system:

> The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief of a binary in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (9)

Through Butler, along with many other scholars in feminist and queer theory, it is apparent that such a binary gender system is purely social construction meant to aid in making sense of how people fit into society. Yet, as the number of individuals who do not identify with one gender, the other, or neither increases the need for a new way of thinking beyond the two-branch gender structure also increases. In *Gaga Feminism*, Halberstam asserts, "gender categories always threaten to run wild, and with every shift and change in cultural meaning and mores, endless new possibilities emerge for love, life, and liberation" (93). Again, Halberstam hits the nail on the head; this last point she makes is exactly what a rhetoric of queer aims to get at.

Halberstam goes on to argue that there are three specific reasons why the gender binary system should be rethought: the gender binary system is (a) dangerous, (b) not necessary, and (c) not actually consistent with lived reality" (*Gaga Feminism* 10). These socially constructed genders are dangerous because they attempt to force individuals to choose between only two rigid categories, when in reality gender is a fluid element that has difficulty staying within the boundaries the genders "man" and "woman" prop up. The genders are not necessary because they do not have any kind of inherent value; they only become valuable when society makes them that way.

Here is another time when the notion of public restrooms comes up: some might reason that some genders are necessary for things like public restrooms. Many people may feel uncomfortable if they had to share a public restroom with someone that they did not identify as part of their "category." Even the former argument is flawed because it is based on how one person's interpretation of his or her gender makes another person feel, which is irrational. To this point, Halberstam and Butler have the right idea: if adults could be as accepting of those of us who choose to not comply with societal norms as children are, the notions, norms, negative feelings, everything that supports the binary gender system would lose significant value and clout, rendering it meaningless.

Unfortunately, that is not how our society operates today. Whether it is in accordance with socially prescribed norms, against them, or somewhere in between, we all make cognitive decisions for ourselves with them in mind. Each and every one of us wakes up in the morning and decides how we are going to present ourselves to the rest of society. The ways we do this is a form of rhetoric, performed through different rhetorical acts. Specifically, the means through which people create their identities and present them to the outside world represent three of the traditional canons of rhetoric: invention, delivery, and style. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* offers a detailed outline of each of these elements of rhetoric. For invention, Aristotle lists all the available "means of persuasion," which he categorizes into different topics a rhetorician could potentially

use to compose an effective argument. Delivery and style focus more on the performative sides of presenting an argument in ways that would build the speaker's ethos, or credibility with his or her audience.

Though it is not written argument, the ways each of us performs our version of gender is counted as a rhetorical performance, our way of situating ourselves amongst the rest of society. We deliver ourselves to the surrounding world through the ways we dress, the language we use, and the lifestyles we choose to live. There are those who choose to live their lives congruently with socially accepted norms – dressing according to their ascribed gender, being in heterosexual relationships, etc – and for the most part, society leaves them alone. For those who choose to live not according to what society deems acceptable, to subvert those conventions imposed on the public through society, there is a greater risk of ridicule, ostracism, and even death.

When we make decisions about how to dress, act, or speak, the decision-making process represents invention. This process involves being aware of the social norms that govern how genders should act, speak, dress and either making the deliberate choice to live congruently or in some kind of opposition to them. Through this process of invention, people develop the kind of image that they wish others to see. Generally speaking, this practice is simple, especially for those who identify with heteronormative norms. People procure various pieces of clothing that they find attractive and they wear them however they want to, they wear their hair in a way they like best, and they ultimately present themselves how they wish to be seen. These kinds of choices are personal and, in theory, should not be influenced by any external elements, though it almost never happens.

However, when individuals do not feel as though the norms that dictate acceptable appearances for the two genders accurately portray how they see themselves, the process of inventing an identity becomes more complicated. People who find themselves in this position expose themselves to the strange looks and mistaken gender when they are in public, which is sometimes motivation enough to try to swallow discomfort and force-fit themselves into the molds of

social norms. However, as mentioned earlier when the institution of marriage was discussed, when the norms are ignored, it opens up the realm of possibilities to make new meaning.

Take the instance of choosing clothing: a person who was born female does not believe that the gender of "woman" adequately suits how she sees herself. Logically it would follow that she would not buy the clothes that were designed for women, but now she gets to choose whatever she wants to wear without being constricted by the strong suggestions from social norms: "No, you shouldn't wear those, they are for men," "Women your age are wearing these this season," etc. Quite literally she can choose whatever she feels properly encompasses the image she has for herself.

Once her decisions are made, she moves onto the delivery and style portions of her argument. Most rhetoricians would agree that these two canons of traditional rhetoric are more focused on *how* the argument is presented as opposed to what the argument is composed of or how it is arranged. The delivery of an argument is perhaps more important than the argument itself; the most well reasoned position can be rendered ineffective if the person presenting the argument cannot come through on delivery. For Aristotle, delivery is of the utmost importance. In listing the canons and their roles in constructing effective argumentation, he suggests, "and third is something that has the greatest force [...], the matter of delivery" (Aristotle 195). Fortunately, there is really no right or wrong way to deliver one's self-image. In fact, the only way that a person could fail at successfully delivering the argument of his or her self-image would be to not fully live up to how they truly see themselves.

In term of style, much of the same can be said as was about delivery: it is about details in how the argument is presented that are important to the style. Style is one of those universal notions meaning that it pertains to the small intricacies, the details that make the argument unique to the speaker, or in the case, whoever is presenting their version of themselves. In other words, for the purposes of the presenting gender as an argument position, the three rhetorical canons would be as follows:

– Invention represents the processes that everyone goes through to determine how they want to interpret socially constructed norms in order to create a version of themselves that best fits how they see themselves.

– Delivery is the way that people enact what they came up with during their invention processes as demonstrated through their dress, language, and/or behavior

– Style is the finishing details on the delivery that makes it distinct to that person, the subtle alterations and interpretations someone might incorporate into their personal presentation of themselves.

The concepts of audience and context are also important in the field of rhetoric, though they are not part of the rhetorical canon. Traditional rhetorical training teaches that every argument should be tailored appropriately depending on the audience and context. The same could be applied to developing and delivering one's personal identity, with the audience and context always changing. There is no doubt that norms exist for different places and situations – the contexts – and for different people. For instance, people tend to dress differently for a wedding versus a funeral, church versus a nightclub, or a food truck versus a five-star restaurant. Further, there are norms about what can and cannot be said at a dinner party, in a movie theater, or at Temple. All of these elements are components in how each one of us shapes our identities, negotiating with unsolicited norms that aim to direct how we present ourselves to everyone else in how we dress and our overall appearance, even to what we say to whom, when, where, and how we say it.

Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* is a text that argues several essential elements that directly inform this idea of delivering one's gender through her notions of gender performativity. This is the idea that each and every individual works to "do" his or her gender, as through delivery: a person delivers his or her version of gender by the way he or she dresses, how he or she uses language, and the characteristics he or she presents to the rest of the world. In her own words, Butler argues:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the
> sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fab-*
> *rications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discur-
> sive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no onto-
> logical status apart from the various acts that constitute reality. (185)

According to Butler and as outlined earlier, gender really does not have any meaning, or rather it is socially constructed instead of biologically mandated, nor does it really exist without the ways in which it is performed.

J. Jack Halberstam combines these thoughts with a hope for the future. In *Gaga Femi-nism*, when she is discussing the possibility of upcoming children who are being raised in non-normative family structures, she anticipates that these young people "might understand gender as something that someone does rather than something some is" (Halberstam 58).

The dynamics of actually queering traditional gender roles essentially represents a person's "delivery" of their own interpretation of gender, to use rhetorical jargon. It is exactly how Halberstam stated above, it is much less about what a person's gender is than it is about how a person does –or does not do - the gender he or she identifies with most. While there is any number of ways to queer gender, usually this myriad of ways can be subdivided into two catego-ries. The first of these is subverting traditional gender norms by fully adopting them in a same sex context. Think of the dynamic of a butch/femme lesbian relationship for instance. In a rela-tionship like this, traditional masculinity and femininity may be upheld almost completely with the only subversion being that two females rather than the traditional male and female couple are enacting those roles.

The other category of queering gender is to subvert traditional gender roles by adopting and deleting desired traits from both traditional gender roles within the same person. Take for example a male-bodied person who chooses to grow a beard and wear dresses and skirts. In this way, gender is queered by highlighting the strictures of socialization to traditional roles. Again,

it is important to note that these kinds of subversions are not limited to those who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There are plenty of instances where people choose to queer gender but still maintain a heterosexual lifestyle.

Within these two categories, there are a few specific ways to think about how individuals might queer gender. From the first category, in which the queering happens through subversion of traditional gender roles, the list includes: butch/femme lesbian relationships, butch/femme gay relationships, and both drag queens and kings. From the second category, where the queering happens through subversion by transcending traditional gender roles, the list includes: gender queer – those who feel they are both genders at once or neither gender at all, two spirits – a term used by indigenous North Americans to describe those who fill mixed gender roles, and androgyny – a term meaning limiting the expression of any type of gender. The point of fleshing out the ways in which people can queer gender is to accentuate the notion that gender is a deliberate and rhetorical act rather than simply something that is ascribed or a choice made at puberty.

All of the categories listed above are portrayed through the act of what Butler calls "doing gender." This can be done in any number of sublet and nuanced ways that include but are not limited to a person's style of dress, makeup and accessories, the way the body is held or how a person moves, the style and timbre of speech, the social roles a person fills, and the way a person relates to his or her partner. Several of these methods of queering relate back to the ancient days of Greece and Rome where young men were trained in rhetoric to hold themselves in specific ways and to speak in a manner that would give the impression of a developed and refined character. All of these things are rhetorical, rhetoric in action. There is a certain style and pitch of speech that is commonly associated with homosexual males, just like there is a style of dress and mannerisms associated with butch women, or women who enact Halberstam's female masculinity. These last couple examples may sound stereotypical, and they are; however, their purpose here is not to say that all gay men style their voices the same or that all butch women dress alike.

Rather, they demonstrate a couple of ways that style – another component of the rhetorical canon – comes into play in a very significant way in terms of doing gender.

The idea of doing gender goes beyond the norms that determine what is acceptable for dress and behavior, but the same can be applied to how people use language. Several scholars have investigated the ways the different genders use language, looking for patterns that might hold the key to better communication for us all.   Interestingly enough, one of the most notable points of consensus among all of the scholarship dealing with the ways men and women use rhetorical strategies and language is that there are prominent differences between them. This is significant because the gender binary system is entirely socially constructed, making the research and studies published regarding differences between the genders based wholly on social constructions that would otherwise not exist.

One noteworthy text published on this topic is Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation.* Focusing her study on how men and women communicate, making note of the differences in how each gender uses language, Tannen argues that the reasons why men and women have difficulties understanding each other in conversation originate from the differences in subconscious goals and worldviews that each gender maintains. According to her, men view each conversation as a competition through which they locate themselves on the overarching hierarchy of themselves and other men, whereas women use language to reach consensus and to enable the formation of relationships.

In her work, Tannen speaks to the major differences between the ways that men and women enter conversations with one another, each with different – sometimes conflicting – goals, and how the two genders actually speak differently. She goes as far as to assert "that many frictions arise because boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures, so talk between women and men is cross-cultural communication" (Tannen 18). She notes the major differences between the genders and identifies that perhaps the differences lie in the ways boys and girls are brought up in society, but she does not touch on the fact that society has created

the genders in the first place. How does that affect the reading of this work? What happens when a biological woman who seems to identify somewhere between no gender and masculine wants to "talk like a man"?

Tannen touches on this briefly when she addresses women beginning to gain access to positions of authority and having to relearn ways of talking like men in order earn respect. But even trying to emulate masculine communication techniques does not always get the job done, as Tannen notes: "Apart from the repugnance of women's having to do all the changing, this doesn't work either, because women who talk like men are judged differently – and harshly" (18). This kind of judgment happens because the woman who is imitating masculine ways of communicating is violating socially constructed norms, which can make people uncomfortable.

Elizabeth Aries is another prominent figure in the field of gender and communications. In her piece "Gender and Communication," Aries' research aims to uncover the ways that the change in gender roles since the 1950s has impacted the ways that researchers look at how gender influences communication. In her findings, Aries reiterates that there are clear differences in the ways that men and women use language. She insists that by using newly developed methods and methodologies to get a closer look into the actual ways that the genders communicate will help researchers get a better grasp on how to accurately understand communication and help avoid miscommunication between men and women in the future.

On that same note, two other scholars, Deborah James and Janice Drakich, conducted a review of studies that focused on gender differences in the amount of talk performed by both genders. They examined sixty-three studies covering 1951-1991 that researched the talk time of the genders seeking to answer the question of why women are stereotyped as talking significantly more than men. In their conclusion, James and Drakich suggest that a newer approach, one that bases itself in sociological studies that examines the social context and expectations of those participating in the conversation interaction – or the sociological perspective of status characteristics theory – should be expounded upon. Overall, they argue:

> The behaviors [of men and women] are best explained in terms of the social
>
> structure of the interaction; this is informed by the difference in status between
>
> the genders and the differential culture expectations about men's and women's
>
> abilities and areas of competence (James 301).

This quotation is significant for two specific reasons: 1) it identifies that there is a sense of social construction behind the ways that men and women communicate, and 2) it addresses the notion of cultural expectations, an idea brought up in the "Queer Theory" chapter of this work that furthers the argument that social norms deliberately aim to influence individuals' behavior.

While this meta-analysis does recognize the implications of social norms on the ways that men and women use language, it still does not expressly mention that the genders themselves are social constructions. However, as previously noted, it does acknowledge the expectations that norms placed upon society, and it goes one step further to suggest that the expectations have to do with the distinct genders and their assumed "abilities and competence," which implies how the norms infiltrate contexts of what people, regardless of sex or gender, can or cannot do. Gender stereotypes are built on judgments like these; obviously there are basic genetic characteristics that are specific to each biological sex; however, stereotypes are, by definition, infamous for drawing conclusions of an entire group based on the qualities of only a few and they almost never account for exceptions.

Overall, there is no doubt that there are different ways that people who identify with the heteronormative gender binary system use rhetoric and language. But there are also those cases where someone might not identify with his or her ascribed gender, yet he or she still exhibits communication characteristics known to one of the genders. Further, it would be an oversight to forget to mention those people who separate themselves entirely from the gender binary system by refusing to use gender pronouns to refer to themselves and request that others follow suit when they address them. As with queering other socially constructed norms, there are infinite

ways people can queer language norms. As a result, it would seem a better fit to configure a categorical system to identify language using characteristics that has nothing to do with gender at all. If, as a society, we feel the compulsion to have to have an organizing system to be able to make sense of our positions and the positions of those around us, why not develop a process of classification that, instead, focuses on grouping people together based on their use rhetorical turns and other language use that has no ties to gender whatsoever?

Socially constructed norms have been part of what has made societies function since the inception of modern societies thousands of years ago. They aim to help streamline people's behaviors to create cohesive cohabiting and, generally, they work at a subconscious level where people barely realize they are adapting their behavior based on them. As discussed, there are several theories about the ways that norms emerge and are maintained, from theories of socialized actors, internalization, and even peer pressure; ultimately, while it is important to know how and why these constructions work, the overall point is that they do have real-life implications, and, in terms of gender norms, lately they are becoming more and more constraining, resulting in overwhelming destructive and even tragic consequences. It is time that these norms are changed to reflect the various kinds of people living in our society, but such change does not happen overnight. Significant change will be painful and jarring, and many people will be resistant to it, but there really is no stopping change. J. Jack Halberstam sums it up beautifully, boldly stating:

> Future shocks are on the horizon, and instead of trying to prevent more damage, we should be hoping that one particularly powerful tremor might bring the whole crumbling edifice of normative sex and gender crumbling down. (*Gaga Feminism* 82)

Works Cited

Aries, Elizabeth. "Gender and Communication." Sex and Gender. By Phillip R. Shaver and Clyde Hendrick. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987. 149-76. Print.

Aristotle, and George Alexander Kennedy. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse.* New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Bennett-Smith, Meredith. "Westboro Baptist Church Claims Christians Are To Blame For 'Fag Marriage'" *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 16 Feb. 2013. Web. 17 Feb. 2013.

Bicchieri, Cristina, and Ryan Muldoon. "Social Norms." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 2011. Web. 18 Feb. 2013.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Conway, Michael, and Lenny R. Vartanian. "A Status Account of Gender Stereotypes: Beyond Communality and Agency." Sex Roles 43.3 (2000): 181,181-199. ProQuest. Web. 14 Sep. 2011.

Gleason, Maud W. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. Print.

Halberstam, Judith. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal.* Boston: Beacon, 2012. Print.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York UP, 2005. Print.

James, Deborah, and Janice Drakich. "Understanding Gender Differences in Amount of

Talk: A Critical Review of Research." Gender and Conversational Interaction. By

Deborah Tannen. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. 281-312. Print.

Tannen, Deborah. You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation. New

York, NY: Morrow, 1990. Print.

"Queer." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, 2013. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.