

**Queer™:
The Creation of Power Structures
within Deviancy**

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ABSTRACT

Queer theory has a fundamental flaw: queer. This thesis seeks to explore the fractured usages, meanings, and scopes of the term queer to uncover the power structures that have been created within and around the term. Specifically, this thesis analyzes the ways in which academic queer theorists, the university system, and LGBTQ+ groups and activists, in an attempt to make the queer useful, perpetuate limiting definitions of the word queer that create power structures that re-marginalize some queer people. Queer, being a reclaimed slur, is sometimes used to describe members of the LGBTQ+ community. It has recently been adopted by a variety of groups to make the term politically useful. In doing so, the term has developed many, often conflicting, meanings. A term that means everything, however, has very little analytical use. Because of this, attempts to make the term queer useful to have unintended implications that re-marginalize some queer people.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Recently (meaning within the past 20 to 30 years) the term queer has been used to describe a certain type of person and a certain type of thought. Stemming from the slur used against members of the LGBTQ+ community, the term queer has a variety of meanings. This work explores the history of the term queer and begins to untangle the various ways queer can be defined. This study of the word queer uncovers various power structures that surround the term. Specifically, this work discusses the way that certain definitions of the term queer and certain formations of queer thought limit and exclude individuals who use the term to describe themselves. This work focuses on three main areas: academia, undergraduate syllabi, and activism.

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INTRODUCTION

In middle school, the bullies called me a queer. In college, my gay friends called me a queer. In graduate school, my professors called me a queer. This following body of work is an academic attempt to process and resolve a phenomenon that I have struggled with personally: being called a queer.

I began my exploration of queer theory soon after coming out. As I sifted through the literature I found myself unable to articulate my resistance to the use of the word queer. My discomfort began with Donald Hall's work *Queer Theories*. Hall broke up the term queer along grammatical lines, giving the term different meanings depending on where the term was located in the sentence. These distinctions, which will be discussed further in Chapter 2, are both useful and not incorrect. I was, however, inexplicably uncomfortable with it. Through further coursework, I stumbled across an article that brought my resistance to the word queer into sharp focus.

That article is titled "Flying Planes Can be Dangerous" by Cynthia Weber. In this article, Weber discusses how the terrorists in the 9-11 attacks are queer. She does not argue that they are same-sex attracted, or that they hold an LGBTQ identity, but rather the way that masculinity and femininity are prescribed to the terrorists makes them queer.¹ She claims

What all this means is that al Qaeda is neither masculine nor feminine, straight nor gay. Instead, it is both: masculine and feminine, straight and gay.

¹ Cynthia Weber. "Flying Planes Can Be Dangerous." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 129-47.

It is what Roland Barthes would call the 'both/and' and what I would call 'queer'. As such, al Qaeda 'confuses meaning, the norm, normativity' of the traditional identity of an enemy target.²

This brought into focus my concern with the word queer: its use. More specifically, I resist the use of the term queer by various actors to make political statements. The reason for this is there is no consensus among those who engage in queer theory, queer activism, or those simply wish to use the term on whom the term is deployed for. Some (be they academics, activists, students, queers, straights, etc.) use it as an umbrella term for a variety of identities, some use it as an identity term itself, some use it as a slur, and some, like Weber, use it as an analytical tool for anything non-normative.³

This thesis seeks to explore the variety of uses of the term queer to highlight the inconsistency with which it is used and to underscore the lack of clarity of who the term should be deployed by and deployed for. In short, who owns the word queer?

THE 'QUEER' QUESTION:

This thesis will seek to answer the following question:

How are power structures formed around the word queer and are reiterated in political and academic practices?

² Cynthia Weber. "Flying Planes Can Be Dangerous." Millennium: Journal of International Studies 31, no. 1 (2002): 129-47.

³ It is important to note that Weber herself in Queer International Relations states that she does not want to stretch queer to be an all-encompassing term, as some queer theorists do. A further exploration of the various uses of the term queer is done in Chapter 2.

This thesis will explore the ways in which power structures have formed around the word queer by exploring the ways in which academia defines the term queer to make it useful, operationalizes and reproduces those understanding to students, and though an exploration of how polities define queer in ways that implicitly and/or explicitly exclude certain identities. To explore this main research question, the following secondary questions will also be explored.

How do academics define the word queer? When do academics define queerness in a universalizing way (Hall) and when do they define queer in a limiting way (Cynthia Weber)?

How is the term operationalized and reproduced through the university structure? What are the implications of Queer Theories reliance on certain thinkers and texts?

How does the use of queer by non-academic polities create similar power structures to those created by academics? What does the re-marginalization of people through exclusive identity groups say about the effectiveness of identity politics?

This is an important interjection into the approach of queer theory and to mobilization efforts for queer issues. By creating a definition of the word queer, academically or practically, that limits the scope of who can claim to be queer to only a few identities, one creates a system in which already marginalized identities are marginalized again. Except this re-marginalization is not by the norms of 'society' but by the norms created within a community that was formed on the basis of difference. Because of this re-marginalization, the way in which queer is defined has very real consequences for marginalized individuals, as they could be removed or excluded from communities in which they belong. As well, a cautionary message to the approach of queer theory that the word used to describe the approach and

the word that is, arguably, the most explored and exploited term in queer theory is often abused, is a necessary interjection into the discourse.

A QUEERS BIAS AND QUEER (IR)RELEVANCE

I want to be clear about the biases included in this work. There is no way for me to engage in this work in an unbiased way. It is impossible to divorce my identity as a same sex attracted, genderqueer individual who actively identifies as queer from the results of this analysis. This thesis is my way of expressing the following very personal sentiment: I am not comfortable with my identity being useful.

This work is not unbiased. Rather, it is authentic and political.

I want to be clear about what I am not saying. I am not saying to eliminate the use of the term queer wholesale. I use the term to describe myself and this thesis does not comment on its use as an identity term. Instead, I am focusing this analysis on instances where individuals want to make the term queer politically useful, for whatever reason, and deploy it without consideration of its complex historical or contextual baggage.

I am also not saying that the work of queer theorists and queer activists is invalid or irrelevant. In fact, this thesis is meant to emphasize the opposite. The work done by queer theorists is incredibly important. I issue the warning to avoid the uncritical use of the term queer in an attempt to eliminate a potentially harmful element to the good work of these activists and theorists. Some queer theorists, like J. Jack Halberstam in their work *Gaga Feminism*, are able to explore and make useful arguments without relying on the term queer by using terms that convey clearly

what the author means and/or creating new terms that do not carry the same baggage as queer.

THESIS STRUCTURE

I have divided this thesis into four sections. Chapter 1 will explore the history of the term queer as well as address the assumptions that I have going into this effort. This history will provide a necessary context to the 'modern' usage of the word queer. The assumptions are necessary to prove that the use of the term queer is 1) a political problem and 2) contains power structures that affect people. Chapter 2 will explore the complexity of the use of the term queer. This is done through a review of the term queer by academics, specifically reviewing academic works. This will highlight the multiple and conflicting uses of the term queer as well as interrogate the political ramifications of academics using the term.

Chapter 3 will explore the reproduction of the use of the term queer and queer theory in undergraduate classrooms. Through a review of syllabi and the works contained within them, this chapter launches an important claim: academics have made a claim of ownership of the term queer. Academics, as shown in Chapter 2, use the term in conflicting ways. However, they have established a specific, normalized narrative around queer theory and queer thought. This chapter seeks to prove that academics are driving a normalized understanding of queer thought and, through the reproduction of this narrative, have claimed an ownership of the term and the thought. This ownership creates a power structure in which the educated are encourage to use queer to describe the world around them, spreading and expanding the power structures discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 will review the use of the term queer by activist groups and politically motivated individuals. Through a review of speeches and propaganda that deploy the term queer, this chapter will explore the influence of identity politics in determining who has ownership of the word queer and who the term queer is used for.

Ultimately, this thesis will argue that deploying the term queer for political purposes is reductive, conflicting, and is often uncritical of who may be disenfranchised by certain uses of the term. This isn't to say queer isn't political, it is. Rather, it is to resist making the term queer politically useful.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This work is an exploration of a single concept (queer) and the power structures that surround it specifically from the perspective of political science. Queer Theory is not synonymous with political science. Queer Theory is often less of its own discipline as it is an approach that can be used by many across various disciplines (Political Science, Women's and Gender Studies, and Sociology to name a few). However many of the main thought leaders are shared between political science and Queer Theory (Foucault being perhaps the most notable). It is important to note that Queer Theory and Political Science have similar aims: to uncover and destabilize power structures.

This thesis relies heavily on that overlap, moving in between political science and queer theory to explore and understand the queer. This interaction is very similar to how Karen Barad describes the interaction between disciplines in "Meeting the Universe Half way." She explains

To write matter and meaning into separate categories, to analyze them relative to spate disciplinary technologies, and to divide complex phenomena into one balkanized enclave or the other is to elide certain crucial aspects by design. On the other hand, considering them together does not mean forcing them together, collapsing important differences between them, or treating them in the same way, but means allowing any integral aspects to emerge.⁴

While Barad is specifically discussing the interaction between physics and philosophy, the same principles apply to queer theory and political science. Treating them as wholly different, or as interchangeable, would be reductive to both. Instead, the two will interact throughout this thesis. I aim to launch a criticism of the queer from a political perspective, but it is undoubtedly also a criticism of queer theory and queer political thought. In this way, this thesis is not situated within mainstream political science. Surely some political scientists would argue that this work is, in fact, not political science. While certainly not the centerpiece of this work, it is important to note that this piece pushes the boundary of what many believe to be political science. This is true of many critical works and perspectives. One of the goals of queer theory is problematize categories and expose the fallacies of binaries. In this work I push the boundaries of both political science and queer theory to expose that an artificial distinction between the two is needless. I do not try to disentangle these theoretical perspectives as they inform one another. Instead, this thesis is done through the messy lens of a queer, a political scientist, a queer theorist, and a queer political theorist.

⁴ Karen Barad. "Meeting the Universe Halfway. - WordPress.com." Accessed April 18, 2018. smartrnightreadingroom.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/meeting-the-universe-halfway.pdf&p=DevEx,5055.

METHODOLOGY

Methods, for queer theorists, are often both a gift and a curse. Due to the flexibility of Queer Theory as an approach, it is open to a plethora of methodological approaches. While these methods enhance the richness of the approach, they are often performed in different fields and with different aims. One of the main criticisms of this thesis is that queer theorists talk past each other and, while it is beyond the scope of this thesis, one of those reasons is the broad spectrum of methods used to explore it. I consider this work an effort in queer theory and will, unfortunately, contribute to the broad spectrum of methods that are used for the approach.

To begin, I perform a genealogy of the term queer. Then I will employ a discourse analysis of academic work, mainly focusing on journals and academic books. I then employ a limited quantitative analysis of syllabi, specifically to track the reliance on key thinkers in queer theory. I then return to discourse analysis to understand how the power structures created by academics are similar to the power structures created by polities.

I will be focusing mainly on qualitative analysis in this body. This qualitative analysis, mainly discourse analysis, will be informed by the collection of descriptive statistics. This will be done to connect academic discourse, the reproduction of the term queer through undergraduate education, and the rhetoric used by polities to uncover the power structures located in each.

I will begin by producing a brief genealogy of the word queer to show how it came to be used by both politics and academics. "Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated with the articulation of the body and history: its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body."⁵ This genealogy will trace how the word began as a slur against LGBTQ+ individuals and eventually became reclaimed by queer movements to later be employed by academics as an approach to theory.

To explore the way in which the term queer is abused by being defined in academia, I will fill out Halls understanding of queer with supplementary accounts of queer as a question to the individual as well as explore other queer theorist who actively define the word queer in limited ways. I will also explore how these queer theorists limit the word queer in conflicting ways, making the academic usage of the term queer muddled within its own literature.

I will first be applying discourse analysis to formulations of queerness from various sources in academia. To do this I will follow the analytical framework for critical discourse analysis laid out in Wodak's "Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis." He provides a five-stage process that proceeds as follows. "1) Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect."⁶ For this thesis, the social problem is the way in which the term queer is deployed. The next stages include "2) Identify obstacles to it being tacked through analysis of the discourse. 3) Consider whether

⁵ Gary Gutting. "Foucault's Genealogical Method." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15, no. 1, 327-43.

⁶ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2016.

the social order in a sense ‘needs’ the problem. 4) Identify possible ways past the obstacles. 5) Reflect critically on the analysis.”⁷ I will employ this framework of critical discourse analysis to academic sources and establish those sources as references for how some definitions of queerness are limiting in a way that creates power structures within the queer.

I will then analyze how academic sources claim an ownership of the term queer by reinforcing a specific narrative of queer thought. To do this, I will quantify the degree to which certain authors and works are taught in undergraduate classes. While not an exhaustive review of undergraduate classes that deal with queer studies, the syllabi chosen for this section are courses focused on queer theory. The repetition of specific authors and works throughout queer courses over time and across academic institutions will show how a specific narrative around queer thought is being created.

The way that I acquired and analyzed these syllabi has important implications for the results of the analysis. I found the syllabi by searching “queer theory syllabi” and downloading the first twenty that were relevant to this search. The criteria for selection of the syllabi were 1) they must be undergraduate syllabi, 2) it must be clear which institution published the syllabi, and 3) they deal in some way with queer theory. The extent to which they all deal with queer theory directly will be discussed below.

⁷ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2016.

Once these syllabi were found, I searched for specific information from them. I found 1) the academic level at which they were taught, 2) the academic semester/year that they were taught, and 3) if the syllabus assigned work done by specific authors and, if so, which works were being taught. I made a list of eight authors that I found were often used in queer theory courses and one film, "Paris is Burning." The syllabi were judged based on the extent to which they included these authors and their works.

The sources were reviewed to determine the number of times the selected authors and one movie (Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, Eve Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Jack Halberstam, David Halpern, E. Patrick Johnson and Paris is Burning) were used. The specific source(s) was recorded in the appendix below. The number of syllabi that assigned a work by the author were found by counting the appearance of each author in syllabi as 1. If a single syllabus assigned three different works by the same author, they were included in the table. However, three articles in the same syllabus would still count as one (1) appearance. These were then totaled, and an average was found. Then the total number of works that were assigned by each author was recorded. The number of syllabi that the authors were assigned in was then totaled. These numbers will be used as the references for how prevalent the authors are in the teaching of queer theory.

I would like to speak briefly about the shortcomings of this method and the potential impact it may have on the analysis. To begin, a sample of twenty syllabi is not a large enough sample size to tell definitively about the reproduction of normalized knowledge in queer theory. Instead, the findings of this chapter should

be read as highlighting a trend which, upon further analysis beyond this thesis, could be seen as a normalization of queer theory.

The authors selected are also a potential hazard for this study. It is entirely possible that authors that have similar or more profound impacts on the normalization of queer theory have been excluded from this study. Rather than claim to be an exhaustive list of authors that have impacted queer thought significantly, this study shows the impact that these specific eight authors and one movie have had on the reproduction of queer thought.

I will return to discourse analysis to explore how power structures are formed within queer polities. This involves a discourse analysis of various relevant sources. The discourse analysis will be of documents that are created by or deployed to a collective of queer identified individuals for a collective of people with a certain formation of queer identity to consume.

An example of such a document is the pamphlet “Queers Read This”, which was distributed at a pride march in New York. “Queers Read This” was published “anonymously by queers” and consists of several short sections that reflect the rage felt by members of the queer community for being rejected from straight society.⁸

I hold that restricting the term queer to certain identities, either actively or passively, creates a de facto definition of queer. I strongly oppose any literature that would seek to tell an individual or a group that they are not queer and it is not the purpose of this project to suggest that these groups are not queer. Instead, this study proposes that these groups and movements critically analyze the use of the

⁸ Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

word to determine if the use of the term queer is truly appropriate for their cause or if they should be more limited in the language that they use.

An example of this limitation of language can be seen in the push for “gay rights”, which was characterized by its primary goal of marriage equality. It is important to note that the slogan for this movement was not “queer rights.” A queer rights movement that sought to gain marriage equality, for instance, should have tried to obtain marriage for all genders and for polyamorous individuals, many of whom identify as queer. Instead, the movement exercised an understanding of who would truly be impacted by the movement and, either consciously or not, did not include identities that would not be impacted.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SPEAK?

Language is, itself, a dimension of power. Much has been written about the use of language to create power structures. This thesis does not explore the theoretical underpinnings of subjectivity to a large extent. However, the subject, specifically the subject as created by language, is a large component of this work. Alecia Youngblood Jackson explains the post-structural feminist perspective on language that this thesis holds a theoretical underpinning in her work “Performativity Identified.”

Jackson explains that “In poststructuralism, the social structures and processes that shape our subjectivities are situated within discursive fields, where

language, power relations and discourses, and social institutions exist, intersect, and produce competing ways of giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity.”⁹

Jackson further explains that “These relations construct subjectivity, but they also provide a range of practices and subject positions for individuals to take up and use in the active construction of subjectivity.”¹⁰ Jackson concludes these thoughts by claiming “Therefore, subjectivity is fashioned out of the interrelationship among discourses, power relations, historical experiences, and cultural practices.”¹¹ This thesis explores the discourses, power relations, historical experiences, and cultural (what I refer to as queer groups) practices that surround the queer subject.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the queer is constantly being defined and redefined by different actions. Jackson supports this in her work when she states “Furthermore, subjectivity is open for reconfiguration because discourses, as part of a network of dynamic power relations, are never fixed and closed but fracture at various points and create spaces for alternative constructions of subjectivity.”¹² This thesis, like much work in Queer Theory, owes an intellectual debt to feminism and the poststructuralist feminist understanding of subjectivity is fundamental to the understanding of language used in this thesis.

⁹ Alecia Youngblood Jackson. "Performativity Identified." *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (2004): 674.

¹⁰ Alecia Youngblood Jackson. "Performativity Identified." *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (2004): 674.

¹¹ Alecia Youngblood Jackson. "Performativity Identified." *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (2004): 674.

¹² Alecia Youngblood Jackson. "Performativity Identified." *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 5 (2004): 674.

CHAPTER 1: AN ASSUMED HISTORY

To perform this analysis of power structures surrounding the term queer, there must be an exploration into how the term queer is used and performed. Before the analysis of the current¹³ usage of the term queer, we must understand the development of the term queer historically. Understanding the history and development of 'queer' is important not only to flesh out the conceptual framework this thesis operates under, but also to provide a necessary history to the power relations at play in the term. Specifically, providing the history of the use of the term queer as a slur and, later, as reclaimed.

Finally, this thesis rests on the assumptions that queer is inherently political, academia is a normalizing institution, and that one of the central claims of queer theory is to be deviant. These assumptions are crucial to understanding why the struggle for ownership of the term queer is political and creates/reproduces power structures.

A BRIEF GENEALOGY OF THE TERM QUEER:

Before the analysis of the uses of the term queer that will comprise the body of this thesis, it will be useful to have a history of the term queer. However, such histories are not often definite. William Turner explains that while historians seek

¹³ Current meaning within the last 30 years.

“some objectively verifiable principles of reason” that would guide their work, poststructuralism poses a threat to that goal.¹⁴ He explains

The fragmentation of identity along lines of gender and sexuality and the fragmentation of truth at the hands of poststructuralist philosophers bode ill for any project that would vindicate universal or objective principles of reason and thus the discipline of history traditionally defined.¹⁵

It is with this understanding that I provide a brief review of the history of the term queer. This review does not claim to be exhaustive, complete, or wholly true. Instead, this history contains the useful elements of the truth needed for this analysis.

Queer has two separate historical usages: a traditional English word to be weird/strange or as the slur used against members of the LGBTQ+¹⁶ community. While this thesis focuses on the latter usage, it is important to mention the former, as they are surely related. Queer has an uncertain etymological history. William Sayers explains that, while the term originates formally from the Scottish ‘queyr’, the term has a much “fuller” history as a slang term.¹⁷ It is fitting that a term with such disparate and paradoxical uses would have such a ‘queer’ history.

The term ‘queer’ began to take on its modern meaning in the late 19th century. Jake Hall Explains “John Douglas... gave us the first recorded written example of queer as a slur back in 1894.”¹⁸ John Douglas used the term queer to

¹⁴ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 24.

¹⁵ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 24.

¹⁶ This is not an exhaustive list of identities in this community,

¹⁷ William Sayers (2010) *The Etymology of Queer*, *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 18:2, 17-19.

¹⁸ Hall, Jake. "Tracing the History of the Word 'queer'." *Dazed*. July 28, 2016.

describe Oscar Wilde (with whom his son had a homosexual affair) in a court case against the writer.¹⁹ “It was through this court case that the original letter surfaced – Douglas had used “Snob Queers” as a descriptor for gay men, establishing ‘queer’s’ reputation as a slur.”²⁰ This was the first recorded use of the term queer as a slur. However, its association with its opposite, ‘straight’, was not immediate. In their article “Is the Word “Queer Offensive? Here’s a Look at its History in the LGBTQA+ Community”, Marrison Higgins explains:

In terms of etymology, "queer" has a pretty interesting background. There are a lot of competing theories about what the word "queer originally meant, but in summation, it always meant "not straight." ...“queer” set itself up as “not straight” centuries before “straight” had even been thought about as a sexual identity. For a while, "queer" had a lot of connotative uses as well, implying that people were drunk, giddy, or happy.²¹

The use of the term queer as a slur for individuals who engaged in same sex activity was complicated in the 20th century with the reclamation of the term.

The reclamation of the term queer began during the aids crises. Jake Hall explains:

Queer’ was later reclaimed in the midst of the Aids epidemic and quickly became a symbol of anarchy. Protests would erupt with little warning, flooding the streets with queer punks declaring “We’re here, we’re queer, we will not live in fear” – a rallying cry which echoed poignantly throughout Soho just weeks ago in Orlando’s devastating aftermath. Activists

<http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/32213/1/tracing-the-history-of-the-word-queer>.

¹⁹ Hall, Jake. "Tracing the History of the Word 'queer'." Dazed. July 28, 2016. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/32213/1/tracing-the-history-of-the-word-queer>.

²⁰ Hall, Jake. "Tracing the History of the Word 'queer'." Dazed. July 28, 2016. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/32213/1/tracing-the-history-of-the-word-queer>.

²¹ Higgins, Marissa. "Is The Word "Queer" Offensive?" Bustle. February 22, 2018. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/139727-is-the-word-queer-offensive-heres-a-look-at-its-history-in-the-lgbtqa-community>.

joined forces in the late 80s and early 90s to form organizations such as Queer Nation, a group whose provocative slogans sought to eradicate hate crime; around the same time, Bruce LaBruce and G.B. Jones were hard at work on *J.D.s*, a cult publication which housed creative expressions of queerness and coined 'queercore' to describe queer punk music. A combination of these factors meant that the early 90s can be pinpointed as the decade in which 'queer' was radically reclaimed. The former insult was worn as a badge of honor; not only did it become a definitive symbol of anarchy and rebellion, it became the ultimate linguistic 'fuck you' to homophobia.²²

The extent to which the term queer was reclaimed by groups like Queer Nation fully reclaimed the word queer, and who they reclaimed the word for, will be further discussed in the body of this thesis.

It is important to note that it did not take long after reclamation began for the term queer to be incorporated into academia. William B. Turner, in his work *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, explains that an article, published in the 90s that attempted to summarize queer theory up to that point "identifies Sedgwick and Butler as Founding mothers of queer theory, but it was feminist film theorist Teresa de Laurites who first used the term "queer" in 1991 to describe her intellectual endeavors."²³ The reason for this, Turner explains, was the utility of term. He claims "'Queer' became useful for the theory and politics of sexual minorities during the late 1980s and 1990s not only because it is easier to say than 'lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender' but also because the proliferation of different groups who demand inclusion in the movement demonstrates the intellectual and

²² Hall, Jake. "Tracing the History of the Word 'queer'." *Dazed*. July 28, 2016. <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/32213/1/tracing-the-history-of-the-word-queer>.

²³ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 5.

moral bankruptcy of binary identity categories.”²⁴ The usefulness of the term queer to academics will be discussed below in Chapter 2.

Turner makes an important distinction, however, between queer theory and the groups involved in reclamation. He claims:

This is not to suggest a direct connection or isomorphism between queer nation and queer theory. There was probably a goodly overlap in the personnel – in his brief history of Queer Nation for Outlook, Alexander Chee offered as his examples of queer political organizations outside of New York and San Francisco the groups at Wesleyan University in Connecticut and the University of Texas at Austin. Even the political manifestations of queerness tended to have an academic tone. Queer Nation seemed perpetually self-conscious about the common desire among participants to be as inclusive as possible – along the known lines of sexuality, gender, race, and class, but along any others that anyone cared to point to as well – and their frequent recognition that the movement was still, for the most part, one of white, middle-class, gay men – the same sorts of people (sexuality, expected) who still produce most of the theory in the United States.²⁵

Here, Turner emphasizes the importance of the identity of those who founded the organizations. He emphasizes this point by concluding, “Herein perhaps lies the key difference between the Nation and the theory. Whatever the dominance of white, middle-class, gay men in Queer Nation, the three persons who set much of the intellectual agenda for queer theory were women, two of them lesbians.”²⁶ The extent to which queer theory is truly more inclusive of identities beyond cis²⁷ white gay men will be discussed further in this thesis, but Turner’s explanation of

²⁴ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 34.

²⁵ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 107.

²⁶ William B Turner. *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000: 107.

²⁷ “Cis” refers to being Cisgender, or identifying as the gender that one was assigned at birth.

reclamation groups such as Queer Nation and their qualified influence on Queer Theory as an academic endeavor is useful.

It is with this history in mind that this thesis begins to unravel the meaning behind the word queer.

ASSUMPTIONS:

This thesis rests on three theoretical assumptions: (1) the 'queer' is inherently political, (2) academia is itself normalizing, and (3) queer theory has as one of its chief aims to destabilize normative structures.

ASSUMPTION 1: INHERENTLY POLITICAL

The queer is inherently political. This, as shown from the genealogy above, is due to the situation of the queer at the lower half of a power dynamic. Specifically, it is the perverse, named such by the normal. The power structures that result from this dynamic, and dynamics like it, have been extensively theorized. Wendy Brown, in her work "Undoing the Demos" explains "Through their formal context and content neutrality, liberal democratic ideals of personhood, freedom, and quality appear universal while being saturated with norms of bourgeois white male heterosexual familialism."²⁸ While the reduction of the power dynamics of queer politics into simply the normal heterosexual and the queer other is reductive in a way that queer theory itself would seek to problematize, it is a useful binary to make the simple claim that to be queer is to be political.

²⁸ Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. S.I: Zone Books: 205.

Being queer is to be apposed to the norms Wendy Brown discusses. Donald Hall explains in his work “Queer Theories” that “One version of being ‘a queer’ is simply to occupy the lower half of that... hierarchized binary.”²⁹ Michael Warner, in his work *Fear of a queer planet*, explores the way queers interact with the world. He claims:

“Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth, trust, censorship, intimate life and social display terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body.”³⁰

If the queer is set permanently as a deviation from societies norm, then queerness is inherently political.

If we accept that to be queer is to be politically and socially oppressed, then any work dealing with queerness is an inherently political one. It is with the assumption that to be queer is inherently political that this thesis seeks to explore who owns the term queer. More specifically, who is the term queer deployed politically for and who among the polity owns the term queer?

It is important to note here the effect of performativity of language. Kira Hall, in her work “Performativity” explains the connection between language and action. She explains performative utterances are those statements “that cannot be evaluated in terms of truth. Such declarations are performative, not constative,

²⁹ Hall, Donald Eugene. *Queer theories*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005: 14.

³⁰ Michael Warner. *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: xiii.

because it is by the utterance of the words that the act is performed.”³¹ Performative language therefor is viewed as constructing an action. Hall continues to explain “...all utterances are performative, even those that appear merely to describe a state of affairs, since such utterances do the act of informing.”³² This concept is necessary to this thesis as this thesis argues that the use of queer by activists, academics, and students are actions, with power relations, that effect people. It is because of the assumption that language is an inherently political act that this thesis can launch its argument.

While chapter 2 and 4 focuses on specifically understanding how queer is defined, chapter 3 focuses on the reproduction of normalized queer thought. It is important to note here that the act of creating a syllabus, of teaching a course, and of learning a subject are built on the use of language and, therefore, are performative in themselves and reiterated specific performances. This chapter seeks to understand how performative language is reproduced through queer theory.

ASSUMPTION 2: THE NORMAL ACADEMIC

The second assumption of this thesis is that academia, as an institution, is inherently normalizing. To address this assumption I turn to *The Tragedy of Political Science* by David Ricci. In this book, Ricci wrestles with the effects of what he views as a narrow, overly simplified teaching of political science have on the

³¹ Kira Hall. "Performativity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, no. .5 (June 1999): 184.

³² Kira Hall. "Performativity." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, no. .5 (June 1999): 184.

study of political science. He is also concerned with the narrow number of texts that are read by political science students.³³ When discussing how to judge syllabi, he claims:

“Let us remember that keeping up with the literature means following a small conversation, based on specialized terms and expressed largely in jargon, which is itself shifting ground constantly as novelty wins out over wisdom and quantity of publication triumphs over quality. The profit from participating in that conversation for a number of years, through an entire program of studies, can only be meager, except for those few students who plan a career in academic political science and therefore must acquire an intellectual road map to the territory. For other students, the costs of reading in the prescribed style will surely outweigh its benefits.”³⁴

This quote speaks to the major concern that this chapter seeks to address in queer theory. Specifically, it speaks to the narrowing of queer thought through the over reliance on a few specific texts that inspire only a few specific ways of thinking. Ricci ultimately claims “This being the world we live in, political scientists would do well to step back from science and to admit to themselves that the truth about politics is not something which can be squeezed neatly into a university curriculum, to be absorbed and digested within the space of time allotted to ordinary students.”³⁵

While this criticism is directed at political science and not at queer theory, the argument that the normalization within and limitations of university learning lead to an inherent reinforcement of what is considered by the community of

³³ Ricci, David M. *The tragedy of political science: politics, scholarship and democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984: 313.

³⁴ Ricci, David M. *The tragedy of political science: politics, scholarship and democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984: 313

³⁵ Ricci, David M. *The tragedy of political science: politics, scholarship and democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984: 318.

scholars as legitimate thought is certainly applicable beyond the discipline of political science.³⁶ Given Ricci's fears about the normalizing effects of the University, I hold the second assumption as valid.

ASSUMPTION 3: THE DEVIANT QUEER

The third assumption is that one of the main tenants of queer thought is to destabilize normative thought. This assumption is found within much of the work that will be discussed below. Cynthia Weber establishes what she feels the ultimate goal of queer thought in her work *Queer International Relations*. In this she leans heavily on Eve Sedgwick's work in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Weber claims "For me, the analytical content [of queer] does not extend to all things nonnormative (as it does for some queer theorists)."³⁷ She then focuses on Eve Sedgwick's definition of queer as "The open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or cant be made) to signify monolithically."³⁸ I begin with this quote specifically because it makes a claim that there are two kinds of queer theorists: those that think queer theory extends to all things nonnormative and those who want to limit it to a small group of identities/qualities. This, like all binaries, is a false binary. And Webers claim here,

³⁶ This also assumes that political science and queer theory operate within separate fields, which is false. Political science and queer theory are incredibly similar in methodology, approach, and canon. In fact, the two disciplines share Foucault and Butler as what many consider necessary inclusions in their respective canons.

³⁷ Weber, Cynthia. *Queer international relations*. S.l.: S.n., 2016: 14.

³⁸ Weber, Cynthia. *Queer international relations*. S.l.: S.n., 2016: 14.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

to not want to extend queer to mean anything beyond gender and sexuality, is particularly strange considering she published an article claiming that heterosexual terrorists were queer.³⁹ This isn't to say she is a hypocrite, per say, as she is speaking about the masculinity (or lack there of) that is prescribed to the terrorists. However, if any person that touches the matrix of gender or sexuality can be in some way analyzed as queer, then the term can be used to describe anything, as we all are trapped in that matrix.

This universal usage of the word queer is discussed in Donald Halls *Queer Theories*. In his work, he differentiates the use of the word queer depending on where it is located in a sentence. I will focus on his use of the queer adjective here. He claims "Queer – the adjective – means that there is... no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviors, desires, abilities and ambitions can be placed. In this way we are all queer, if we simply admit it."⁴⁰ The universalizing versus limiting debate in queer theory is explored in depth in Chapter 2, so here I will simply say that queer is, generally, used to interrogate the nonnormative. However, the assumption that the interrogation of the normal is a fundamental part of queer thought holds. In a sense, this thesis is itself incredibly queer. Queer in the sense that I am attempting to destabilize and expose a normalizing structure.

The genealogy above, accompanied by the assumptions, are fundamental to understanding how struggles for ownership of queer create and reproduce power structures. By defining in whatever way the term queer, with its complex history,

³⁹ Weber, Cynthia. "Flying Planes Can Be Dangerous." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 129-47.

⁴⁰ Hall, Donald Eugene. *Queer theories*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005: 14.

the speaker is staking the claim that to be 'queer' is to be X. However, the boundaries of where queer begins and where queer ends are vague and debated. Nothing shows the struggle for ownership of the term queer more clearly than the use of the term by academics.

CHAPTER 2: THE SILENT ACADEMIC STRUGGLE FOR OWNERSHIP

The term queer is used in academia to mean a variety of things. This chapter seeks to begin to untangle the various meanings that surround the word queer to interrogate the power structures located around the term. This will take place in three main parts: First, I will untangle the use of the word itself, interrogating the difference in meaning between the noun, verb, and adjective. Then I will interrogate the tension within the term as both limiting and universalizing. Finally, I will put these disparate meanings in the context of the reclamation of the term queer. I do this to answer the question: “*How do academics define the word queer? When do academics define queerness in a universalizing way (Hall) and when do they define queer in a limiting way (Cynthia Weber)?*” The analysis of this chapter will show that the myriad of ways in which queer is defined, used, and perceived creates unmanageably large and paradoxical understandings of queer. This leads to confusion over whom the term queer is deployed for and who should deploy the term.

QUEER QUEERS QUEER QUEERNESS.

The phrase “Queer queers queer queerness” is a grammatically correct sentence. The reason for this is that the meaning of queer changes depending on its position in the sentence. In his work *Queer Theories*, Donald Hall begins, as some queer theorists do, with a brief definition of the word queer. His definition is worth

exploring because it outlines the meaning of queer depending on where it is located in the sentence. This is an action that many queer theorists do implicitly, or at least without naming, as will be explored later.

He begins with the use of 'queer' as an adjective. The use of 'queer' as an adjective indicates that one "is to abrade the classifications, to sit athwart conventional categories or traverse several."⁴¹ Hall further explains:

"Queer – the adjective – means that there is... no single word, no simple slot into which complex personalities, behaviors, desires, abilities, and ambitions can be placed. In this way, we are all queer, if we simply admit it. We are all athwart if we expose and repudiate some of the comforting lies told about us and that we tell ourselves."⁴²

An example of queer used as an adjective can be found in Weber's "Flying Plans can be Dangerous." She claims "What all this means is that al Qaeda is neither masculine nor feminine, straight nor gay. Instead, it is both: masculine and feminine, straight and gay. It is what Roland Barthes would call the 'both/and' and what I would call 'queer'."⁴³ Here, Weber uses queer to describe the relation of al Qaeda to the norm, highlighting the situationality and positionality of the group athwart the norm.

The word 'queer' used as a noun "is simply to occupy the lower half of that last hierarchized binary."⁴⁴ It is important to note, "A 'queer' was something that

⁴¹ Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 13.

⁴² Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 13.

⁴³ Cynthia Weber. "Flying Planes Can Be Dangerous." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (2002): 143.

⁴⁴ Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 13.

you clearly did not want to be. If possible, change or be changed. And if it is impossible to change, then certainly be silent and celibate.”⁴⁵ This use is starkly different from the last. This use of ‘queer’ does not describe complex positionality like the adjective, but places the individual into a position of inferiority. This undoubtedly stems from the origin of the term ‘queer’ as a slur used against LGBTQ+ individuals, which will be explored later.

An example of the queer noun can be found in Michael Warner's *Fear of a Queer Planet*. In the introduction to this book, he claims “And queers live as queers, as lesbians, as gays, as homosexuals, in contexts other than sex.”⁴⁶ Here Warner uses queer as a noun, indicating a specific identity category: homosexuals. We will delve deeper into the limiting aspects of this definition below, but this use supports Hall's overall distinction between noun, adjective, and verb.

The use of the word queer as a verb is when “the ‘queer’ noun will take on a transitive verb form, spread its queerness, convert others, awaken discontent, and undermine the system.”⁴⁷ It is further explained “‘queering’ does pose a particular threat to systems of classification that assert their timelessness and fixity.”⁴⁸ The verb form of ‘queer’ outlined here describes a movement away from the norm.

⁴⁵ Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 14.

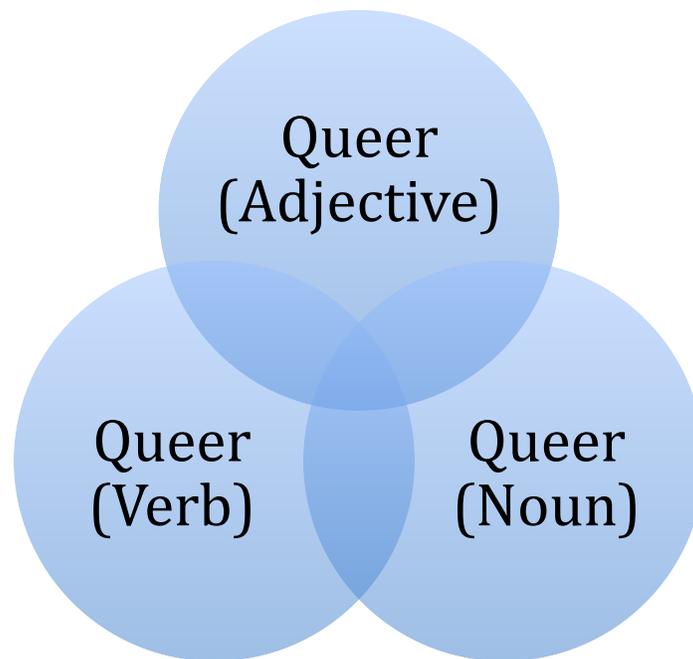
⁴⁶ Michael Warner. *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: vii.

⁴⁷ Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 14.

⁴⁸ Donald E. Hall. *Queer Theories*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003: 14.

An example of queer as a verb can be found in *Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes* – Anne Enright’s “The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch. In this work, Bracken seeks to analyze the power structures found in “The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch” using queer theory. In doing this, Bracken claims, “This essay practices a similar engagement with queer theory, suggesting that while the pleasure of Eliza Lynch is not concerned with an exploration of queer identity to any large degree, there are temporary moments in which the central characters are queered.”⁴⁹ Here Bracken recognizes that she is not dealing with the noun or adjective queer, but is instead interested in actively interrogating the ‘fixity’ of power within the story.

Figure 1:



⁴⁹ Claire Bracken. "Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes: Anne Enright's "The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch"." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 110.

UNIVERSAL VS. LIMITING

These grammatically based definitions help to tease out another axes of tension located within the word queer: the limiting and universalizing nature of the word. Surely queer theorists will object to the creation of binary here. I create this binary not to claim that all definitions fall into one of these two categories. I create these categories to do the opposite, to expose the tension between the two categories and highlight the range of possible uses that are located in the spectrum in between.

To begin, let us explore the universalizing queer. Eadie explains "The strength of the more expansive use of queer is that it gets beyond straight logic to suggest a field of sexual diversities."⁵⁰ Britzman explores the universalizing 'queer' used in queer theory by claiming:

"Queer theory, then, becomes queer when, as Teresa de Lauretis (1991) notes, 'It conveys a double emphasis on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production, and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing out own discourse and their continued silence.'"⁵¹

It is clear from this explanation of queer theory that queer is not used to explore LGBTQ+ identity, but instead as a tool to interrogate the extent to which discourse is deconstructed. Surely, under this definition, any mode of thought can 'become queer.' This queer is a tool that can be used to analyze any subject, making queer universally applicable.

⁵⁰ Jo Eadie. "Queer." Paragraph 17, no. 3 (1994): 246.

⁵¹ Deborah P. Britzman. "Queer Pedagogy and Its Strange Techniques." Counterpoints 367: 294.

Brackens previously discussed work *Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes* is another example of the universalizing definition.⁵² Bracken frees herself of having to navigate, explain, or label LGBTQ+ identities while using queer as a tool for analysis. This allows her to apply the term queer beyond the scope of specific identities. This example highlights that the universalizing vs limiting definitions do not, necessarily, contradict the grammatical definitions previously discussed. Brackens definition is a universalizing verb. Surely a limiting verb is also possible. The universalizing and limiting uses operate in addition to and as another dimension of the grammatical uses.

Limiting definitions of the word queer restrict the use of queer to specific identity categories. Limiting definitions of queer focus by and large on sexual or gender identity categories, however there is no consensus on which sexual or gender identities belong within this definition or if gender identity should be included at all.

One example of a limiting definition can be found in "Queer Performance and Performativity", in which the authors claim:

"This section of QED is dedicated to the documentation and illumination of events/performances/happenings in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer (LGBT+TQ) communities. In particular, the construction of "queer performance and performativities" reference that set of activities in/of/as/ related to LGBT+TQ communities; a diverse range of activities relevant to intersecting academia and activism in a LGBT+TQ world making project."⁵³

⁵² Claire Bracken. "Queer Intersections and Nomadic Routes: Anne Enright's "The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch"." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 110.

⁵³ Bryant Keith Alexander, Madison Moore, and C. Riley Snorton. "Queer Performance and Performativities." *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking*, no. 1 (2013): 193.

This limiting definition specifically references specific gender and sexual identity categories. Limiting definitions can also be found in “On mother-Love: History, Queer Theory, and Nonlesbian Identity”, in which Carter uses queer primarily to refer to identities, however does list all of the identities that could claim it. She references a “queer community”⁵⁴ without defining who is in that community. She implicitly agrees that both gender identities and sexualities are included in the term throughout the work, however she does not set forth a specific list. While this ambiguity might lead some to refer to it as universalizing, the term is limiting because it is referring to queer as an identity category. Surely if there is a queer community, there are communities that are not queer. Queer, then, is not a universally applicable tool but rather a label to describe a limited kind of people.

The limiting definitions of queer in queer theory are usually in conflict with one another because each author tends to have a unique understanding of which characteristics or identity categories make a subject queer or, as Carter shows, they use it as an umbrella identity term without specifying which identities are under that umbrella. To further complicate the understanding of queer within the literature, some authors use queer as both limiting and universalizing.

In the introduction of “Fear of a Queer Planet”, Michael Warner makes an effort to explain what queers want and, in the process, posits a limiting definition of the word queer. He claims, “What do queers want? This volume takes for granted that the answer is not just sex. Sexual desires themselves can imply other wants,

⁵⁴ Julian Carter. “On Mother-Love: History, Queer Theory, and Nonlesbian Identity.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1 (2005): 109.

ideals, and conditions. And queers live as queers, as lesbians, as gays, as homosexuals, in contexts other than sex.”⁵⁵ In this, Warner uses the noun queer to limit the scope of queers to homosexuals. He then goes on to claim

“Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time, locally and piecemeal but always with consequences. It means being able, more or less articulately, to challenge the common understanding of what gender difference means, or what the state is for, or what "health" entails, or what would define fairness, or what a good relation to the planet's environment would be. Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer.”⁵⁶

Here Warner uses queer as a universalizing effort to destabilize normalized understandings of certain subjects. To Warner there is a connection between the limited and universalizing definitions. He claims “For left social theorists this book suggests how queer experience and politics might be taken as starting points rather than as footnotes.”⁵⁷ Here, he connects how the limited definition he posited connects to the use of queer as universal tool to de-stabilize common or normal understandings.

This connection of universalizing and limiting definitions can also be found in Kates work “Making the Ad Perfectly Queer: Marketing “normality” to Gay Men’s Community.” In this work, Kates claims

“Queer theory originates from gay and lesbian studies, French post-structuralism, lesbian-feminist writing, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. It is a relatively recent body of radical anti-essentialist thought about the relationships between sexuality, gender, and power for it first appeared in

⁵⁵ Michael Warner. *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: vii.

⁵⁶ Michael Warner. *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: xii.

⁵⁷ Michael Warner. *Fear of a queer planet: queer politics and social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011: vii.

the early 1990s, inspired by a 1989 academic conference on gay and lesbian studies in the humanities"⁵⁸

Here, Kates uses a historical understanding of the development of queer theory to connect limited use of queer, specifically referencing homosexual identities, to the universalizing use of queer, which is used to interrogate essentialist thought.

Freeman also explores both the limiting and universalizing definitions of queer, however her use is distinctly different from Warner and Kates. She claims

"To me, "queer" cannot signal a purely deconstructive move or position of pure negativity. In enjoining queers to operate as agents of dis- or de-figuration, critics like Lee Edelman (whose compelling *No Future* follows that Lacanian injunction that there is no sexual relationship) risk evacuating the messiest thing about being queer: the actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and with objects. Contact with other bodies demands, and will generate, a figure, as happens over and over in the battle scenes of "its a Queer Time." Indeed sex may unbind selves and meanings, but these must relatively quickly rebound into fantasies, or the sexual agents would perish after only one release of energy. The fact that the secondary figure may be false, or in a belated relationship to the movement of desire, is less compelling to me than the fact that it is often so beautiful and weird."⁵⁹

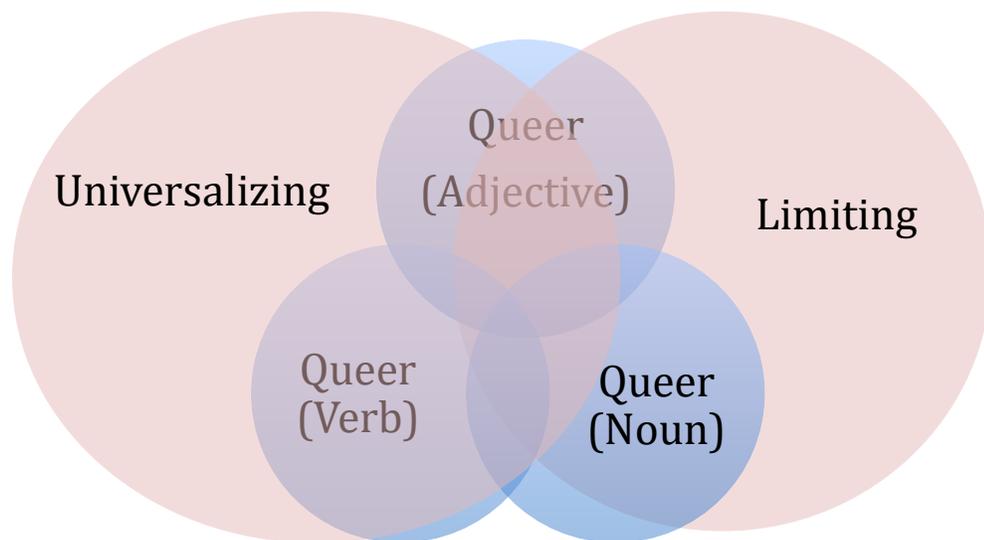
Here, Freedman acknowledges that specific bodies are the location where queerness is located and resists the negative implications of universalizing uses of queer, suggesting a limited definition of queer. However, her final claim of 'beautiful and weird' suggest a slightly different universalizing use of the word queer, one that is less focused on norms and destabilization and more focused on celebrating weirdness and difference.

⁵⁸ Steven M. Kates. "Making the Ad Perfectly Queer: Marketing "Normality" to the Gay Men's Community?" *Journal of Advertising* 28, no. 1 (1999): 26.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Freeman. *Time binds Queer temporalities, queer histories*. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011: xxi.

There is no consensus in the literature around the tension between the universalizing, limiting, and both universalizing and limiting use of queer. These tensions are often reproduced or complicated by authors who either are not aware of the tensions or avoid addressing them.

Figure 2:



RECLAMATION

The term queer has a complex history because it is a reclaimed slur. This reclamation process continues to influence the way that individuals use and view the word queer. I argue here that the reclamation process has been asymmetrical. Some, usually academics, believe the term to be reclaimed and wish to use it in ways

that have been previously discussed. Others, usually non-academic LGBTQ+ identified individuals, feel that the term is not fully reclaimed and wish that it not be used. This is not to say all non-academic LGBTQ+ individuals view that queer as only a slur. As will be discussed, non-academic LGBTQ+ individuals were integral to the reclamation process. Instead this chapter argues that *some* non-academic LGBTQ+ individuals feel that it is not or should not be used as a reclaimed slur. This section explores specifically the academic reclamation of the term queer followed by personal statements from modern non-academic LGBTQ+ identified sources.

Most academics hold that the reclamation of queer began in the 1980s and 1990s. Jeffs, in their study of reclaimed slurs, claims “The gay community in the 90s has been very successful in reclaiming the word Queer.”⁶⁰ Rand agrees with this, claiming that it was Queer Nation in the 1990’s that began the more visible reclamation of queer.⁶¹ This reclamation is significant, according to Jeffs, because “In reinventing language to be fresh, we give it power, and old practices are challenged, as well as institutionalized language, which is seen to be inappropriate and nothing more than a stigma-creating tool of society.”⁶² Rand reiterates this importance to queer theory, claiming,

“But it was Queer Nation, in particular, that was often taken up in queer scholarship as the most prominent – even if not the most successful or representative- example of innovative queer activism, becoming something

⁶⁰ Sandy Jeffs. "Madness, Language and Reclaiming Meaning." AQ: Australian Quarterly 70, no. 3 (1998): 36.

⁶¹ Erin J. Rand. Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 3.

⁶² Sandy Jeffs. "Madness, Language and Reclaiming Meaning." AQ: Australian Quarterly 70, no. 3 (1998): 36.

of a cause célèbre that spurred on scholars seeking to explicate the contemporary shift in the theorizing and practice of sexual identities”⁶³

Rand qualifies this, however, by claiming that part of the reclamation process was done by academics. He claims “If Queer Nation has, in fact, effected a resignification of “queer” and made that label available as an identity category, it is, at least to some extent, a consequence of queer theorists’ documenting and taxonomizing the shift in terms.”⁶⁴ This is a broad overview of the academic origin of the word queer, but it does not fully address the tension between academic uses and activist uses of the word queer.

Rand wrestles with the tension between academia and activism, but ultimately does not address the individual. Rand claims, “No matter how much activist and scholarly work may be mutually beneficial, there is no denying that each group often occupies very different institutional positions, and the resulting discrepancies in power and privilege can be the source of much contention.”⁶⁵ He addresses this tension by recommending that

“Queer can be reclaimed in a positive manner only to the extent that its status as a hurtful epithet is not guaranteed; the indeterminacy of the effects of a word is the possibility for that word to signify otherwise. However, this same indeterminacy makes it possible for the words of a manifesto – its call to constitute an action-oriented audience - to fail.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 3.

⁶⁴ Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 5.

⁶⁵ Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 5.

⁶⁶ Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 19.

Here Rand recognizes that the status of queer as a slur can cause the application of it to be problematic. He, however, artfully maintains that queer is not only useful but should be used academically because he adopts a universalizing defining.⁶⁷

Those that do not agree that the word queer has been reclaimed resist not only its use to describe academic endeavors, but identities as well. John Kichi, a 66 year old man, made news when he claimed that the word queer was as bad as racial slurs. Cited in an ABC article, he claims "I think queer harkens back to a time when being gay was a documented medical abnormality. Queer is also not a gender, and if you want to list sexual orientation, that's even more egregious. To me, this was an attempt by the university to scare away anyone who wasn't straight."⁶⁸ He is not the only individual to claim that it holds a similar level of negativity as racial slurs.

Several gay men have taken to the internet to describe their distain for the word and compare it to racial slurs. Two are listed here:

"Queer" remains problematic, however, because it is still a dictionary defined homophobic slur that many people, myself included, find deeply offensive. Using the slur may lead people to think it's now okay to use it, generating some of the same type of confusion that has arisen over use of the N-word by whites. It's also problematic because, as a slur wielded by

⁶⁷ "My definition of queerness clearly works against the prevailing academic and popular trends to employ "queer" as either an umbrella term for 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender' identities or as a label for sexualities and politics that disrupts the hetero/homo binary. This is a de-essentialized notion of queerness that disconnects 'queer' from any particular referent and refigures it as the undecidability from which rhetorical agency is actualized." Erin J. Rand. *Reclaiming queer: activist & academic rhetorics of resistance*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014: 22.

⁶⁸ James, Susan Donaldson. "Gay Man Says Millennial Term 'Queer' Is Like the 'N' Word." ABC News. November 12, 2013. Accessed October 19, 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/gay-man-millennial-term-queer-word/story?id=20855582>.

homophobes, embracing it means continuing to define ourselves on their terms. You can flip a coin to change its face, but it remains the same coin.”⁶⁹

“Using a term many of us find insulting and painful, however, is not inclusion — it’s exclusion and rather inconsiderate. It accomplishes the opposite of inclusion. I’d be quite happy with Rainbow Voices. I doubt many of us had traumatic experiences with rainbows. But, many people, myself included, had very painful experiences with being labeled “queer.” ... I don’t even like using those words to express why I hate being labeled queer — regardless of who does it.”⁷⁰

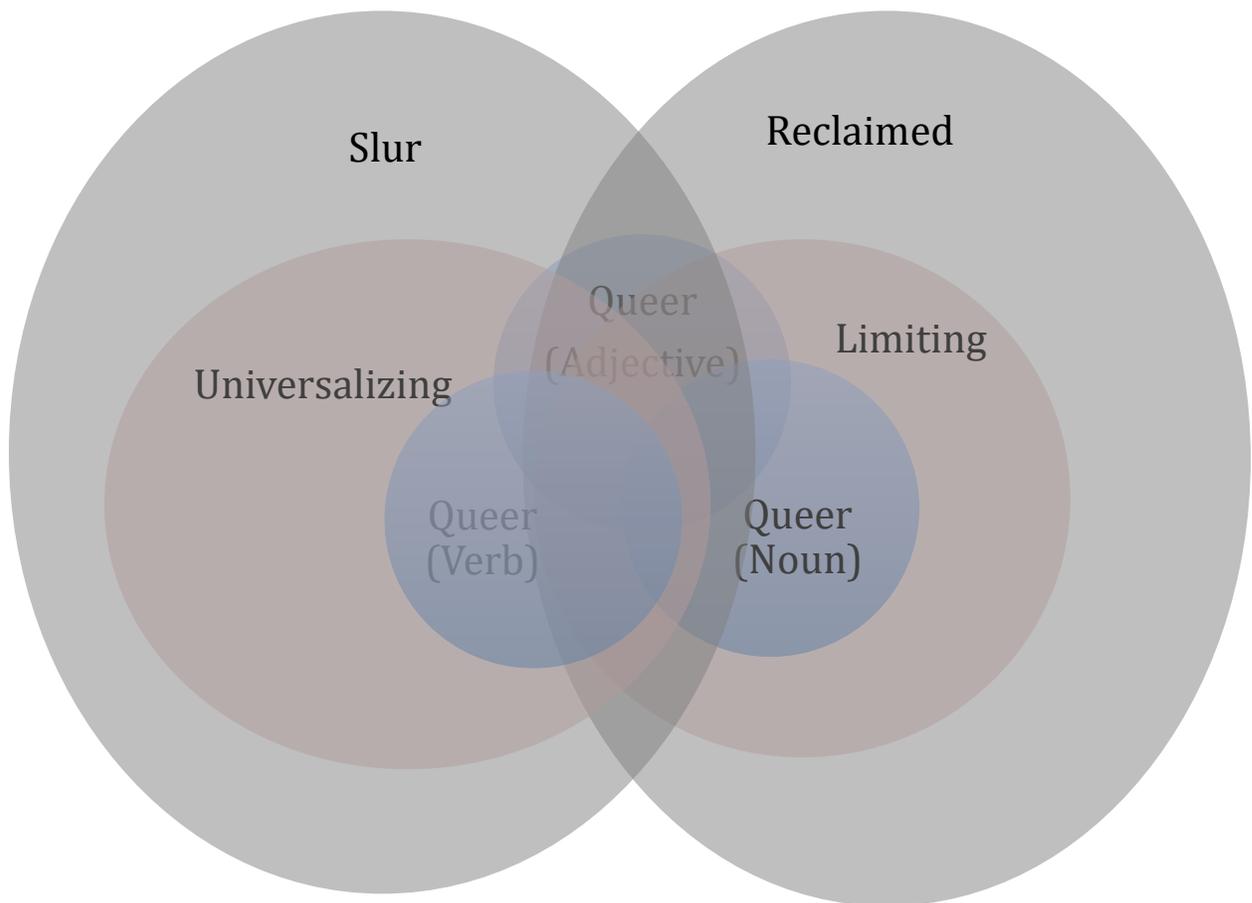
It is important to note that both of these quotes were taken from Huffington Post blogs written in 2016. These men speak to something that I have encountered in my life as a gay man. I have perceived, in my life as a queer identified individual in southern Virginia, queer is considered affirming among young, educated individuals but is still seen as a slur by older generations. It would be an interesting exploration to analyze the regional perceptions of reclamation, as it seems the south is less convinced that queer is a reclaimed slur than the north. Such a study is outside the scope of this thesis, however.

The point stands, however, that there are individuals who feel that not only should academics or straight people avoid the use the word queer, but LGBTQ+ individuals should not use the word queer either.

⁶⁹ Stokes, DaShanne. "We Need To Move Beyond LGBT Alphabet Soup And Slurs." The Huffington Post. August 02, 2016. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dashanne-stokes/we-need-to-move-beyond-lg_b_10465840.html.

⁷⁰ Peron, James. "Not Queer, Just Gay. No, Thanks." The Huffington Post. February 03, 2016. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-peron/not-queer-just-gay-no-thanks_b_9145566.html.

Figure 3:



CONCLUSION:

The reason this thesis is titled “Queer™” is because this thesis seeks to uncover the subtle tug of war beneath the surface of queer theory over who gets to deploy the term queer. Who gets to call someone a queer? There is a silent and passive fight, contributed by every queer theorist who takes a stab at defining the word queer, for ownership of ‘queers’ meaning, scope, use, and deployment. As each

queer theorist posits their own definition, the meaning of the word becomes more fractured, confusing, and paradoxical.

This chapter is an exploration of the effect that these various definitions have on the practice of queer theory. The uses all, in their own way, contain truth because they are all used by queer theorist. This leads to a particular question: how can any academic seek to use the term queer if all of these different definitions and uses are possible and queer theorists, generally, do not agree on a standard usage?

William Turner posited an understanding of queer in his work *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* that speaks to this. He claims

“Queer has the virtue of offering, in the context of academic inquiry into gender identity and sexual identity, a relatively novel term that connotes etymologically a crossing of boundaries but that refers to nothing in particular, thus leaving the question of its denotations open to contest and revision.”⁷¹

What Turner offered was a concise answer to the question posed above. He is absolutely correct that queer “refers to nothing”. A term that potentially refers to everything, in effect, refers to nothing. He is also correct in his understanding that that nothingness is useful. The emptiness of the term is useful for the individual theorist because it allows them to define queer in a way that is useful to them, as has been explored. This thesis does not argue that any one definition or use of queer is appropriate. This chapter argues that the emptiness of the term as a result of the plethora of definitions and uses is detrimental, however, to Queer Theory as an

⁷¹ William Benjamin Turner. *A genealogy of queer theory*. Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2000: 35.

academic approach because the plethora of meaning uncritically cheapens, weakens, and creates paradoxes within the fields understanding.

There is a quote from Hegghammers essay *Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries* that speaks directly to this issue. While Hegghammers work specifically talks about the terminology used to describe Jihadi-Salafis and directly reference the tension in a western academic labeling non western actors, his comments on how terms are deployed by social scientists on 'others' are useful to emphasis the argument of this thesis. Hegghammer claims:

“The assumption that political actors can only be analysed using concepts employed by the actors themselves is a flawed one. Analytical categories in the social sciences are not made to please the actors, but to accurately represent observable and discrete phenomena so that one can construct theories with universal and predictive value. If the concepts and categories are clearly defined, rooted in observable behavior and constructed with an acute awareness of relevant cultural specifics, then their western origin is irrelevant.”⁷²

The way that queer has been deployed collectively in queer theory is not clearly defined, it is not rooted in observable behavior, and is not constructed with an acute awareness of relevant cultural specifics, as has been explored in this chapter. An important question that must be posed, in addition to the criticisms above, is do we, as queer theorists, care that our terms “are not made to please the actors?” Surely the gay men described above who do not think queer should be used academically have a stake in the conclusions of queer theorists work. Do we, as social scientists and scholars, feel it acceptable to ignore their qualms for the sake of our analysis?

⁷² Roel Meijer. *Global Salafism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 263.

This criticism of the use of queer does not invalidate the conclusions reached by these academics. If anything, it reinforces the importance of the conclusions. That our work is important because as queer theorists we launch an important criticism of power structures and we, as queer theorists, should be mindful of the ones we create.

The logical conclusion then is to avoid the term queer. Arguments made through the use of the term queer are inherently not dependent on the word because, as has been said, the word itself means nothing and is only filled with the meaning that the individual author gives it. Instead, these analyses require a word that specifically addresses the phenomenon they are attempting to analyze. It would be better academic practice for theorists to, instead of manipulating a word into meaning what they need it to in order to perform their analysis, to either be specific what they are referencing (normalcy, LGBTQ+ identities, masculinity, femininity, etc.) or create new words that are able to perform the labor without being burdened by the baggage that is carried by the word queer.

I understand that this move, to caution against the use of the word queer academically, has the potential of created a hierarchy, one in which the use of the term queer would be on the lesser end and, therefor, would relegate queer academically to its initial position: athwart the norm. This is not the intention of this thesis. I hope, instead, that the uncritical, ahistorical, paradoxical uses of the word queer are put into larger critical discussion within the discipline so that the queer approach does not cave in on itself through the sheer weight of queers' hollowness.

This chapter was presented at the International Studies Association North East Conference in the fall of 2017. The queer theorists at the conference struggled to understand why this mattered. They argued that the term queer, like so many terms before it, was being operationalized. The following chapter is a response to the notion that queer can (and should) be operationalized.

Chapter 3: Normalizing the Queer - A Brief Review of Syllabi

At the ISA-NE Conference, a queer theorist asked why operationalizing the term queer was different than, say, operationalizing the term democracy. What she meant by this comment is that we, as theorists, change our definition of the term democracy to help make the term useful.

My response to this, at the time, was that I felt uncomfortable operationalizing people's identities. I felt uncomfortable making a slur useful and encouraging its widespread use. What I did not explain at the time, as it was not yet a fully formed thought, was that we as academics set a tone for how those who read our work. We must be careful in our speech, as those who wish to be informed will certainly follow our example. It is from this realization that this chapter was created.

This chapter seeks to answer the question: *"How is the term operationalized and reproduced through the university structure? What are the implications of Queer Theories' reliance on certain thinkers and texts?"* The analysis in this chapter will explore the way that teaching queer theory in higher education can reinforce a normalized way of thinking about queer theory. This is particularly dangerous for queer theory not only because it can reproduce harmful understandings of the term queer. But also because queer theory attempts to destabilize normative structures elsewhere and deals directly with the lived experiences of individuals. To have a normative structure that affects the lives of the very individuals on behalf of which it claims to be doing its work is a serious flaw. By creating a normative structure around queer thought, academics are reinforcing to their students a sense of ownership of

the word queer. Theorists, discussed in Chapter 2 as vying for ownership of the term queer, are reproducing that sense of ownership to their students.

This chapter relies heavily on the three assumptions discussed in Chapter 1. Specifically, it relies on the assumptions that 1) higher education and the academy serve as normalizing institutions and 2) an interrogation and destabilization of norms is a fundamental task taken up by queer theory. This chapter ultimately argues that the reproduction of knowledge in the academy has impacted queer theory in such a way that a normative structure has been created. This normative structure favors a particular kind of thought, specifically thought in the vein of Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick. This chapter concludes with a caution to queer theorists about the normalizing ways the academy effects queer theory and a call for further investigation into the specific normative structures within queer thought.

Operationalizing the Queer

Operationalizing terms is a necessity for the Social Sciences. Operationalizing is “the process of strictly defining variables into measurable factors. The process defines fuzzy concepts and allows them to be measured, empirically and quantitatively.”⁷³ Social scientists are very used to operationalizing terms as much of the work we do deals with vague concepts. The democracy example provided by the conference goer is very apt. We constantly define and redefine democracy to best fit the argument we are trying to make. Democracy, for theorists, is a tool.

⁷³ "Operationalization." Defining Variables Into Measurable Factors. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://explorable.com/operationalization>

Part of the desire to operationalize is that it “defines the exact measuring method used, and allows other scientists to follow exactly the same methodology.”⁷⁴ It is here that operationalization is dangerous for the term queer. We operationalize terms with the intention that those terms, with those assigned meanings, are reproduced. When we operationalize the term queer, as described above in chapter 2, it is done so with the intention to be reproduced.

This operationalization is intimately linked with citationality. Constantine Nakassis describes citationality in their work *Citation and Citationality*. They explain “as explicitly manifest in canonical citational acts like quotations, citationality refers to a more general property of (meta)semiosis: the ability to represent an event of discourse while reflexively marking that representation as not(-quite) that which the citaitonal act presences.”⁷⁵ The authors explored below were chosen due to their positions as highly cited materials. This is, they are often referred to, discussed, and quoted. While Nakassis explains that citationality allows for an exploration of new ideas through the liminality created by the act of citing⁷⁶, those ideas are developed on the basis of the work being cited. This is to say, while the authors below begin large and important discussions and provide a starting point for queer thought, they by the same token establish as the dominant mode of queer thought. These authors and works represent the foundation of queer thought.

⁷⁴ "Operationalization." *Defining Variables Into Measurable Factors*. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://explorable.com/operationalization>

⁷⁵ Constantine V Nakassis. "Citation and Citationality." *Signs and Society* 1, no. 1 (2013): 51-77.

⁷⁶ Constantine V Nakassis. "Citation and Citationality." *Signs and Society* 1, no. 1 (2013): 51-77.

That foundation, through optimization and citationality, is reproduced through academic structures.

It is this reproduction that I wish to highlight in this chapter. Reproducing an operationalized term and encouraging its use by students reproduces the problematic power structures listed above. Twenty syllabi were analyzed for the frequency that selected authors and their works occurred within them. The results are listed in the Appendix below.

Figure 4:

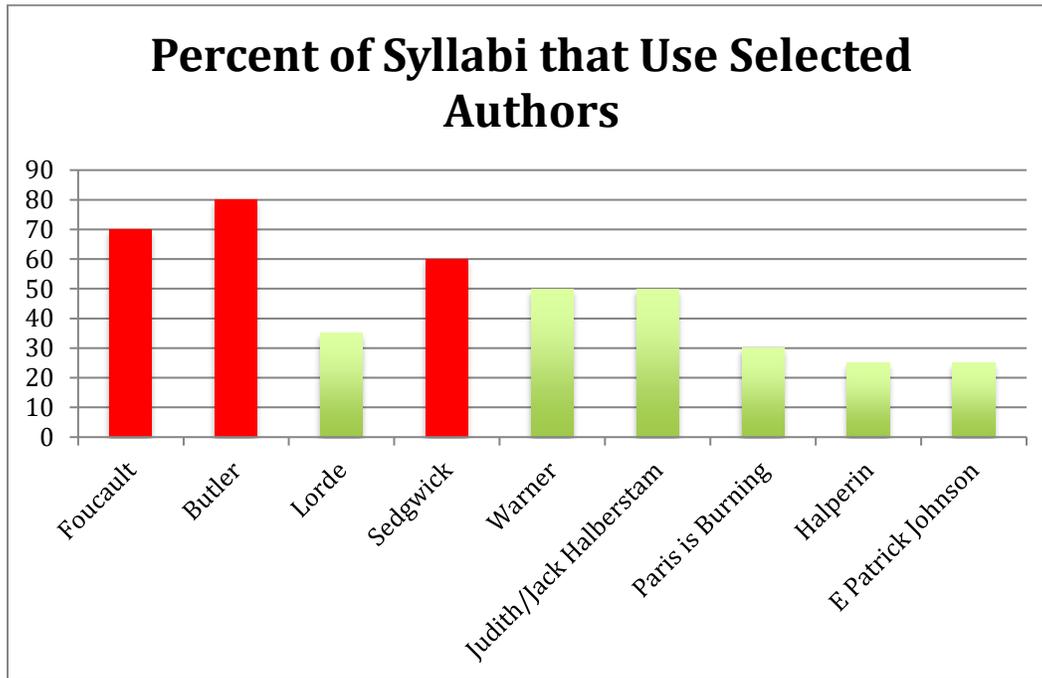
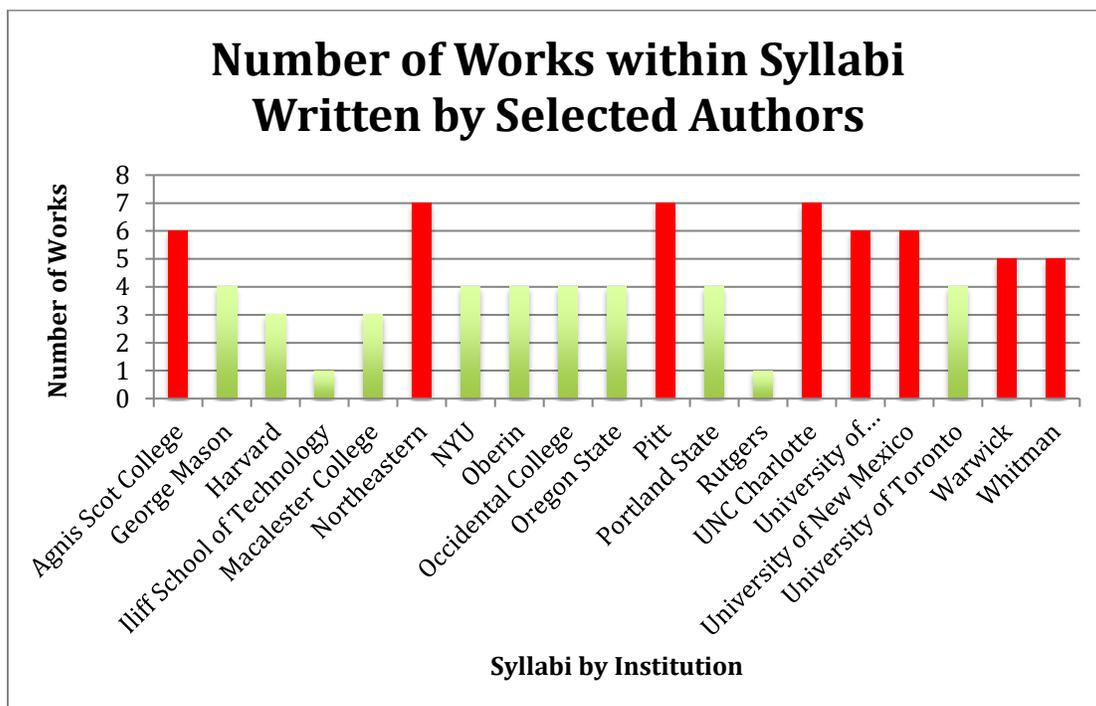


Figure 5:



Results

The results show that the 20 syllabi analyzed contained at least one work from the eight authors explored (Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, Eve Sedgwick, Michael Warner, Jack Halberstam, David Halpern and E. Patrick Johnson) and one movie (Paris is Burning). On average, 4.25 of the authors were included in the syllabi and 5.5 individual sources from the authors were included. Two syllabi, one from Rutgers and one from Iliff School of Technology, only had one work from one author listed. The most number of the selected authors included in the syllabi was 7 (University of Pittsburg, UNC Charlotte, and Northeastern). The most number of sources from these authors included in one syllabus was 16 sources included in the University of Pittsburg syllabus. The syllabi vary greatly in when they were taught. The oldest syllabus is from 2000, which is one of the two outliers that has only one of the authors included in the syllabus. See Figures 5 above.

The authors themselves varied in prevalence in the syllabi (see Figure 4). Judith Butler was the author with the most readings included in the sampled syllabi. A work of hers, in some capacity, was included in 80% of the reviewed syllabi. Michel Foucault was the next most influential author, being included in 70% of the reviewed syllabi. Eve Sedgwick was also found to be heavily influential, appearing in some capacity in 60% of the reviewed syllabi. The rest of the authors were cited at 50% or fewer. David Halperin and E. Patrick Johnson were the least prolific, each appearing in 25% of the syllabi.

It is also important to note that only readings specifically from these authors were included in this study. Many of these syllabi included works that were heavily

influenced by these authors, cited these authors, or even assigned readers for their work to help the students understand the more complex thought. This is to say that the ultimate impact of these authors on these syllabi and the reproduction of knowledge in queer theory are most likely greater than what is being analyzed here, as these other sources were not included in this study.⁷⁷

Analysis

The results of the review of the syllabi indicate that the trend in teaching queer theory is to rely on several key texts and thinkers. By not searching with any filters other than a connection to queer theory, the samples taken are wide enough in scope to realistically cover the range of topics that would fall under queer theory. As well, by selecting the first several syllabi that came up in a search, the syllabi chosen are ensured to have a role in the reproduction of knowledge themselves. Often instructors will look to other syllabi as a way to gauge the quality of their syllabi and to inform the construction of their syllabi. These syllabi will impact the reproduction of knowledge in that they are a suggestion to other academics of how to teach queer theory.

⁷⁷ It is important to note here that there are deep limitations to the analysis possible with this data. First, this data was collected in an English speaking north American context. Surely those that participate in queer theory are not limited to North America. While performing a larger analysis of the reproduction of normalized thought in queer theory is certainly called for, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, this chapter does not seek to claim these are the only thinkers, and the only mode of normalized thought, in queer theory. Instead, this chapter simply begins that conversation. To understand the entirety of this phenomena, a global review of syllabi, as well as lectures, class discussions, class structures, student participation, that spans various countries, languages, and disciplines is required.

The results of this search show that many of the same authors and many of the same works are used to teach queer theory. Assuming that most individuals that encounter queer theory will do so as an undergraduate, this sample informs the first impression of queer theory many students will have. The majority of students are taught that Butler, Foucault, and Sedgwick are fundamental to their understanding of queerness. By reinforcing these authors as necessary texts, these students (and potential queer theorists) are indoctrinated into a normalized thinking of queerness.

The reliance on these key thinkers and texts through the analyzed syllabi suggest that the way that queer theory is taught to undergraduates is similar across institutions. This is, itself, not an overly significant finding. All academics, regardless of field, rely on a similar canon to inform their teaching. The reason it is significant that there is a similar teaching throughout the study of queer theory is that queer theory claims to analyze the positionality of individuals athwart the norm. The normalization of queer theory creates a paradoxical situation in which the individuals that claim to be advocating for a non-normative thought participate in the reification of specific formations of the 'queer.'

Conclusions

Not all of the authors, and their respective sources, use the term queer as an analytical tool, although some do. However, all are used in the context of teaching the queer. Academia is making a claim that to understand these texts is to understand queer thought, to understand the queer experience, and to properly deploy the queer tool.

The analysis has shown that there are several key texts and authors that inform queer thought in the academy. This chapter argues that the reliance on key texts ultimately undermines the 'queerness' of queer theory in that queer theory is normalized. However, like Ricci's analysis of political science, there is little to be done about the normalization of subjects in the Academy from the inside.

As shown in Chapter 2, academics are staking claims about the meaning 'queer' that constitute a claim for ownership. This chapter shows that academics are reproducing a certain way of thinking about the 'queer' to their students. In this way, academics are firming their grip on the term queer. By teaching students that queer is a useful academic tool and/or a useful framework to study society, these students will inevitably reproduce those thoughts, or at least a variation of them.

By operationalizing the queer, by manipulating the definition of queer to mean what ever is useful to us (Chapter 2) and reproducing it to the students who look to us to set an example (Chapter 3), we reproduce the power structures that either exclude certain individuals who define themselves as queer or we expand the term so broadly that it encompasses everyone, effectively removing the term from its historical context as a slur specific to the LGBT community. By operationalizing the term, we reduce and trivialize the struggles and experience of individuals for the sake of our work. By reproducing this thought through academia, we reinforce this power dynamic by spreading the thought to our students.

Ultimately, this chapter is call to queer theorists to be more self reflective about how and why we are reducing a particular way of thinking. As well, this chapter is a call for further analysis. This chapter is flawed not only in the scope of

syllabi that have been reviewed, but also because the reproduction of knowledge in colleges and universities is not limited to the courses syllabi. It is imperative that queer theorists look critically at all different aspects of the university to determine where certain 'truths' are being reinforced or repeated.

So far, the focus of this thesis has been focused on academia. Both the professors that wish to use the queer as a tool and the students who are taught this approach. However, the use of queer, specifically to make political claims, is not limited to journal articles and the classroom. Queer activists and queer groups make similarly damaging attempts to define queer as academics. The following chapter explores how the term queer is manipulated by individuals to make political claims.

Chapter 4: Queer (?) Groups and Queer (?) Activism

This chapter seeks to answer the question *How does the use of queer by non-academic polities create similar power structures to those created by academics? What does the re-marginalization of people through exclusive identity groups say about the effectiveness of identity politics?* I will analyze the use of the term queer by groups and queer activists. This chapter will begin with a general review of Identity Politics, followed by a brief summary of the critiques launched against it. Then this chapter will link identity politics with queer activism. Finally, this chapter will argue that the use of the term queer by activists groups is problematic, as some activist groups deploy the term queer, either uncritically or to achieve specific political aims, in ways that negatively impact the lives of people who either do, or do not, identify as queer. This deployment is similarly problematic as the deployment of the term by academics in Chapter 2. Specifically, by reproducing limiting definitions of the word queer, individuals who would identify as queer are often excluded from these definitions through the erasure of their identity. This creates and reproduces power structures through the political deployment of 'queer'.

Identity Politics

Identity politics is difficult to define due to the varied ways in which it is applied. Catherine Bliss begins to define identity politics in her work *Marketization of Identity Politics*, in which she claims "Identity politics is a US-based concept, arising from the black and feminist movements' struggles for equal rights and

opportunities, and the resulting affirmative action policies.”⁷⁸ Mary Bernstein complicates this definition, in her work *Identity Politics*. She claims:

“The term identity politics is widely used throughout the social sciences and the humanities to describe phenomena as diverse as multiculturalism, the women's movement, civil rights, lesbian and gay movements, separatist movements in Canada and Spain, and violent ethnic and nationalist conflict in postcolonial Africa and Asia, as well as in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe. The seeds of these partially overlapping conversations are apparent from the very first uses of the term identity politics in the scholarly journals.”⁷⁹⁸⁰

The variety of subjects that fall under the term ‘identity politics’ complicates understandings of the terms as identity politics can be deployed very differently depending on the context. It has been said, “All politics is identity politics.”⁸¹ The extent to which this statement is true will be discussed below, but it is worth to mention it here to highlight that this chapter does not claim to be an exhaustive account of identity politics or the ways identity politics is related to queer activism.

Bernstein continues to complicate the understanding of identity politics by claiming “In addition to using the term identity politics to describe any mobilization related to politics, culture, and identity, scholarly analyses have often elided normative political evaluations of identity politics as a political practice with

⁷⁸ Catherine Bliss. "The Marketization of Identity Politics." *Sociology*, 5th ser., 47 (October 2013): 1012.

⁷⁹ Mary Bernstein. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 47.

⁸⁰ It is also important to note how new identity politics is. While academics can “draw on intellectual precursors from Mary Wollstonecraft to Frantz Fanon, writing that actually uses this specific phrase, with all its contemporary baggage, is limited almost exclusively to the last thirty years.” Cressida Heyes. "Identity Politics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. March 23, 2016. Accessed April 08, 2018. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>.

⁸¹ Roger Lancaster. "Identity Politics Can Only Get Us So Far." *Jacobin*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/identity-politics-gay-rights-neoliberalism-stonewall-feminism-race>.

sociological analyses of the relationship between identity and politics.”⁸² Bernstein’s claim that identity politics is intimately connected to political practice is immensely important, as it reinforces the impact of academic work on peoples’ lives and vice versa. This is highlighted by Wendell Pritchett, who notes, “While much of the academy has debated the merits of identity politics, in the ‘real world’ activists have been struggling to deal with specific societal problems that are intimately related to economics.”⁸³ Bernstein makes an important note about different aspects of identity politics. She explains:

“‘Identity’ as it relates to social movements has at least three distinct analytic levels: First, a shared collective identity is necessary for mobilization of any social movement, including the classic labor movement. Second, expressions of identity can be deployed at the collective level as a political strategy, which can be aimed at what are traditionally thought of as cultural and/or political goals. Third, identity can be a goal of social movement activism, either gaining acceptance for a hitherto stigmatized identity or deconstructing categories of identities such as ‘man,’ ‘woman,’ ‘gay,’ ‘straight,’ ‘black,’ or ‘white.’”⁸⁴

Queer activism cuts across all three of these levels. Bernstein provides a useful starting point for the analysis of identity politics, however she issues an important warning to those who wish to invoke the term. She suggests that “the term identity politics obscures more than clarifies and, if the term is used at all, its meaning should be clearly defined.”⁸⁵ For this reason, this chapter does not make any claims about what does or does not constitute identity politics. Instead it

⁸² Mary Bernstein. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 48.

⁸³ Wendell Pritchett. "Identity Politics, Past and Present." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 67th ser. (Spring 2005): 38.

⁸⁴ Mary Bernstein. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 59.

⁸⁵ Mary Bernstein. "Identity Politics." *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 66.

analyzes a fundamental flaw within the deployment of identity politics in queer activism.

Critiques of Identity Politics

While this section is titled critiques of identity politics, these critiques do not destabilize the foundations of identity politics. Instead they launch important cautions about the traps and limitations that are characteristic of identity politics.

To begin, let's return to the claim that "All Politics is Identity Politics." Roger Lancaster launched an important criticism of this claim in their work "Identity Politics Can Only Get Us So Far." They claim:

The claim that all politics is about identity is so general that observers can use it to give a flyover view of almost any political phenomenon. After all, every movement positions an "us" against a "them" and builds support by enlisting people to join a group and to *identify* with a cause. That this assertion can apply to so many cases is not a strength. The paradigm rejects an analysis of the particular in order to feign expertise in the general, erases the historical specificities of given struggles and movements, and paints everything with the same brush.⁸⁶

This is a necessary interjection into the discourse of identity politics, as a trap in identity politics can be the erasure of historically specific circumstances. Lancaster continues with their critique, specifically in the context of gay activism, claiming:

"In its late-1960s upsurge, gay politics had less to do with the pageantry of identity than with urgent demands to end violence and oppression. Activists first called for the cops to get out of our bars, the institutions to get off of our backs, and the shrinks to get out of our lives. Identity comes up early, of course, usually in discussions of coming out. In this context, however, activists gave no hint of seeking what Nancy Fraser

⁸⁶ Roger Lancaster. "Identity Politics Can Only Get Us So Far." Jacobin. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/identity-politics-gay-rights-neoliberalism-stonewall-feminism-race>.

calls "recognition," nor did they reify homosexuality as a person's unchanging essence."⁸⁷

This sense that identity politics fails when it reduces the politically and historically specific experiences and struggles to more universal, less authentic categories is not unique to Lancaster. In *Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics*, Allison Weir claims "When identity politics rest on an assumed sameness and agreement, the effect is a silencing that is, in fact, a form of dis-identification... The identity of the "we," then, is a false identity, based on an agreement and a sameness that do not in fact exist."⁸⁸ She instead advocates for a transformational identity politics. This "rests on the engagement and identification of each participant with the "we": if I identify with this "we," it matters to me to engage in questioning and critique, to continually rethink, and thereby reaffirm, the basis of our attachment."⁸⁹ Judith Butler reinforces this claim, in her work *Gender Trouble*. She concludes that book by explaining

"If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configurations of politics would surely emerge from the ruins fo the old. Cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate or, rather, their present proliferation might then become articulable within the discourses that establish intelligible cultural life, confounding the very binarism of sex, and exposing its fundamental unnaturalness."⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Roger Lancaster. "Identity Politics Can Only Get Us So Far." *Jacobin*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/08/identity-politics-gay-rights-neoliberalism-stonewall-feminism-race>.

⁸⁸ Allison Weir. "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics." *Hypatia* 23, no. 4 (2008): 128.

⁸⁹ Allison Weir. "Global Feminism and Transformative Identity Politics." *Hypatia* 23, no. 4 (2008): 128.

⁹⁰ Judith Butler. *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge, 2015: 148-149.

This critique, that we must not treat identities as fixed, ahistorical formations, is fundamentally important to understand the linkage between queer activism and identity politics.

Linking Identity Politics to Queer Activism

To begin, we must first make a distinction between gay politics and queer politics. Steven Seidman discusses the difference between these two types of identity politics in his work "From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in the Social Logic of Normative Heterosexuality in Contemporary America. He explains, "Moreover, I suggest that if we understand gay identity politics as a response to a repressive social logic of normative heterosexuality, a historically unique type of sexual politics, so called queer politics, can be viewed as a response to gay normalization."⁹¹ Gay normalization, or homonormativity⁹², is a specific kind of rhetoric surrounding specifically gay male identity, and to a lesser extent gay women, that reinforces the state while granting increased, but still limited, access to mainstream culture for those identities involved.⁹³⁹⁴

This then begs the question: what is the goal of a queer identity politics and how is that goal different from gay identity politics? Seidman begins to answer this

⁹¹ Steven Seidman. "From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in the Social Logic of Normative Heterosexuality in Contemporary America." *Social Thought and Research*, 2001: 1.

⁹² Cynthia Weber. *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁹³ Cynthia Weber. *Queer International Relations: Sovereignty, Sexuality and the Will to Knowledge*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁹⁴ Steven Seidman. "From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in the Social Logic of Normative Heterosexuality in Contemporary America." *Social Thought and Research*, 2001: 1.

by explaining, “a queer politics would simultaneously advocate removing a wide range of sexual intimate practices from institutional regulation, and offer democratic justifications for state intervention to create the material and cultural conditions of sexual autonomy.”⁹⁵ The difference, then, between a gay identity politics and a queer identity politics is that gay identity politics advocates for the acceptance, liberation, and support of men who have sex with men and, perhaps with less intensity, women who have sex with women. Queer identity politics, on the other hand, advocates for acceptance, liberation, and support for all sexual activities.⁹⁶ Currently, there is much debate over the inclusion of aromantic and asexual individuals within queer identity and queer identity politics. Aromatics are individuals who “don’t experience romantic attraction.”⁹⁷ Asexual individuals are individuals who don’t experience sexual attraction.⁹⁸

In their HuffPost article, Stephanie Farnsworth makes an impassioned plea that “queer activism must be for aromantics too.” She claims

⁹⁵ Steven Seidman. "From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in the Social Logic of Normative Heterosexuality in Contemporary America." *Social Thought and Research*, 2001: 12.

⁹⁶ This sentence wades into waters far too murky to be explored in this chapter, but the phrase “all sexual activities” opens up this chapter to the debate about who is and is not considered queer. While I have discussed this at length elsewhere, it is important to note here that some sexually illegal activity, like pedophilia or bestiality, is considered by a small but vocal few to be queer. This, again, reinforces the argument that queer is not a clearly defined word and can be easily hijacked by those who don’t understand the importance of consent to sexual activities.

⁹⁷ Stephanie Farnsworth. "Queer Activism Must Be For Aromantics Too." The Huffington Post. October 04, 2017. Accessed April 08, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-activism-must-be-for-aromantics-too_us_59d4d6f8e4b0da85e7f5ed2a.

⁹⁸ These two definitions are reductive, in a sense, as aromantic and asexual identity exist on a spectrum. However, to commit the exact sin this thesis seeks to shed a light on, I will use these definitions as they are useful.

To be truly inclusive as a community then we have to do more than just say “queer” instead of “LGBT”. We need to be truly queer. That means talking about issues that intersex people face, examining life beyond binaries, recognizing pan identities as well as bi, and talking about asexual and aromantic identities. It means constant advocacy on behalf of the whole queer community, including for greater funding and support services for ignored queer identities.⁹⁹

Here, Stephanie makes an important move, one that is critical to the analysis of this chapter. She treats the term queer as an umbrella term. To put this in the framework established in Chapter 2, she is using the term as a limiting term. What she is arguing is that the limits of group be expanded to include several other identities that she views belongs. In the analysis of queer identity politics rhetoric below, I use the argument of expanding the limited definition of queer to include additional, but still limited, identities as a launching point to analyze the political motivation behind queer rhetoric. Specifically, to show that identity groups wish to be included in the queer umbrella as it creates a larger platform for them to advocate for their rights.

Queers Talking About Queers

The following section reviews several iterations of queer rhetoric found in activist or advocacy groups. This sections specifically seeks to unearth 1) who is talking, 2) what is being advocated for, and 3) how the deployment of the term queer within those sources seeks to make a political claim. The validity of the claims made in the sources reviewed is not contested. In fact, we can assume that the

⁹⁹ Stephanie Farnsworth. "Queer Activism Must Be For Aromantics Too." The Huffington Post. October 04, 2017. Accessed April 08, 2018. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/queer-activism-must-be-for-aromantics-too_us_59d4d6fbe4b0da85e7f5ed2a.

following claims for inclusion made by the following sources are all valid. The following review seeks to determine the political connotations that are carried with the deployment of the term queer.

Queer Nation: Drawing Boundaries

To analyze the limiting nature of queer identity politics, I will use the case of Queer Nation. To be clear one must comprehend the differences between the concept of queer nationalism and movement Queer Nation. Queer Nation is an organization that lacks a complete history, but was started in 1990's and had the goal of expanding and fighting for a nation of queers.¹⁰⁰ Queer nationalism, however, is the imagined community of queer individuals. This definition of queer nationalism is not pulled from any one specific source, however is implicit in the analyses explored below. This distinction between the institution of queer nationalism and the organization Queer Nation is important, as it is not a distinction that is drawn clearly in "Queer Nationality" by Berlant and Freeman, a key work in the exploration of queer nationality.¹⁰¹

Queer Nation distributed a pamphlet titled "Queers Read This" at a pride march in New York.¹⁰² "Queers Read This" was published "anonymously by queers"

¹⁰⁰ Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman. *Queer Nationality*. In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner, 193-229. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993: 151.

¹⁰¹ Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman. *Queer Nationality*. In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner, 193-229. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

¹⁰² Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

and consists of several short sections that reflect the rage felt by members of the queer community for being rejected from straight society.¹⁰³

In the introduction to the pamphlet, the writers clearly establish an us/them dialog between queer and straight people. The pamphlet claims:

“Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality, as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers. Straight people will not do this voluntarily and so they must be forced into it. Straights must be frightened into it. Terrorized into it. Fear is the most powerful motivation. No one will give us what we deserve. Rights are not given they are taken, by force if necessary. It is easier to fight when you know who your enemy is. Straight people acknowledge your invisibility and continue to live in and contribute to a culture that kills you. Every day one of us is taken by the enemy. Whether it’s an AIDS death due to homophobic government inaction or a lesbian bashing in an all-night diner (in a supposedly lesbian neighborhood)” (“Queers Read This”, Anon.).

This rhetoric, calling upon the invisibility of queer people in straight society and straight societies culpability in AIDS crisis, clearly establishes an imagined ‘self’ consisting of ‘queer’ individuals that is juxtaposed to the imagined other of straight individuals.

This queer-self/straight-other rhetoric is characteristic of the piece, but an important message is contained in the section “AN ARMY OF LOVERS CANNOT LOSE.” This section calls for queers to “make every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city of yearning and then total satisfaction. A city and a county where we can be safe and free and more.”¹⁰⁴ Here the pamphlet makes clear reference to two identity groups: gay men and lesbian

¹⁰³ Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

women. This is reiterated later in the pamphlet when the authors claim “We use queer as gay men loving lesbians and lesbians loving being queer. Queer, unlike GAY, doesn’t mean MALE.”¹⁰⁵ This is a very important move because it shows that what these activists and revolutionaries are fighting for is the liberation of gay men and lesbian woman, but they are only advocating for those groups.

The emphasis on gay male activism is seen in the imagery that Queer Nation produced as well. Queer Nation produced and distributed images of Queer Bart (Figure 6).

Figure 6:



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¹⁰⁵ Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

¹⁰⁶ "QueerRing." RMIsaac's Queer Pages. <http://www.rmisaac.com/queer.html>.

Freeman and Berlant analyze the creation of Queer Bart, a reimagining of Bart Simpson from the TV show “The Simpsons”. This reimagining shows Bart in tight short shorts, an earring, and a tank top with QN (for Queer Nation) on it. Queer Nation put this queer reimagining of Bart onto shirts. Freeman and Berlant explain “Queer Nation’s shirt locates the public space in which the individual Cartesian subject must be out, transforming that space in order to survive. Queer Nation’s design maps a psychic and bodily territory – lavender territory – that cannot be colonized and expand it to include, potentially, the entire nation.”¹⁰⁷ This repurposing of a character for the queer community, placing it on a shirt, and then using the body, marked by the shirt, to claim space as part of “lavender territory”, is a great example of how Queer Nation views the individual who it claims is queer: a gay man (and sometimes, as discussed above, a gay woman).

This is significant as it relies on a gender binary of man/woman who are same sex attracted. In this document, these anonymous queers are drawing a boundary around queerness that only includes gay men and lesbian women. It is also important to note that a characteristic of the document is that queerness is detached from history. The document implies that an imagined community of queer individuals has always existed. In a reprinting of “Queers Read This” in July, 2009, a new group of anonymous queers state in a preface to the document that “The cultural references in this leaflet are, at times, outdated, but the rage is timeless.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman. *Queer Nationality*. In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, edited by Michael Warner, 193-229. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous. *Queers Read This*. New York, NY, 1990.

Here, Queer Nation detaches the imagined community from its historical context, claiming that the community is “timeless.” We know this to not be true, as the genealogy above shows the rather recent history of queerness. In this way, queer nation creates a sense that queer has always referred to gay men and lesbian women. This ahistorical identity boundary around the word queer has since been contested.

Lani Ka’ahumanu

On April 25th 1993, Lani Ka’ahumanu gave a speech a March on Washington. Lani used the platform to make many political remarks and, through the course of her speech, advocated for the inclusion of bisexual individuals. In her speech she said “I stand here today on the stang of the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Equal Rights and Liberation.”¹⁰⁹ This marked the beginning of her attempt to raise the need of bisexual rights. She continued by remarking “are bisexuals visible yet? Are bisexuals organized yet? Are bisexuals accountable yet? You bet your sweet ass we are! Bisexuals and here, and we’re queer.”¹¹⁰ By staking a claim that bisexuals belong within the boundaries of inclusion under the term queer, Lani allows herself to make a case for raising the level of advocacy around bisexuality. Later in the speech she says “Recognition of bisexual orientation and

¹⁰⁹ Lani Ka’ahumanu. "Speech to the March on Washington." Queer Rhetoric Project. May 21, 2010. Accessed April 08, 2018. <https://queerrhetoric.wordpress.com/2010/05/21/speech-to-the-march-on-washington/>.

¹¹⁰ Lani Ka’ahumanu. "Speech to the March on Washington." Queer Rhetoric Project. May 21, 2010. Accessed April 08, 2018. <https://queerrhetoric.wordpress.com/2010/05/21/speech-to-the-march-on-washington/>.

transgender issues presents a challenge to assumptions not previously explored within the politics of gay liberation. What will it take for the gayristocracy to realize that bisexual, lesbian, transgender, and gay people are in this together, and together we can and will move the agenda forward.”¹¹¹ Here, Lani makes an important move: she highlights a power dynamic in which same-sex attracted individuals sit at an advantage. The same identity group that called themselves queer in Queer Nation, the same identity group that drew boundaries around the term queer to include only gay men and women, now are challenged to expand the definition of queer to new identity categories. It is important that there is a subtle, implicit power in being queer implied here. The power in being queer is not to be accepted by mainstream society. The power lies in the ability to advocate, and advocate successfully, for ones rights and the belonging to the larger queer community. Lani seeks to empower bisexuals by staking their claim in the term queer, by allowing bisexuals ownership of the term queer, and giving them access to that power.

Lani shows us that the queer is powerful. Not all-powerful, but relatively powerful. It is here that the struggle for ownership becomes apparent. To be a part of the queer, Lani and many bisexuals, is to belong and there is power in that belonging.

¹¹¹ Lani Ka’ahumanu. "Speech to the March on Washington." Queer Rhetoric Project. May 21, 2010. Accessed April 08, 2018. <https://queerrhetoric.wordpress.com/2010/05/21/speech-to-the-march-on-washington/>.

Queer in the Bedroom and in the Kitchen

Auto-straddle is a wonderful home for content aimed toward queer people. The website is home to a variety of content aimed to discuss and celebrate “Girl on Girl Culture.”¹¹² In perusing the website, I came across two different articles that underscore how subtle political statements are made when individuals are scoped in and out of the definition of queer.

The first article I came upon was “Be Part of Autostraddle’s Queer in the Bedroom Gallery.” In this article, the website asked visitors to send in photos so the website could make a compellation highlighting their readership. There were two main requirements: 1) the photo must be taken in a bedroom and 2) the picture must be of queer people. In the frequently asked questions portion of the article, the author explained what they meant by ‘queer.’ They explain “Queer people are lesbians, bisexuals, queer and otherwise-identified women, trans and non-binary folks.”¹¹³ This definition is striking as it leaves out gay men. The author went far enough to scope in individuals under the definition of queer that both Queer Nation and Lani Ka’ahumanu did not (non-binary individuals.) but left out gay men. To be fair, autostraddle is a website aimed at women who love women, so it is safe to assume that men are not their target audience. So I checked further into the website

¹¹² Laneia. "Be Part of Autostraddle's Queer in the Bedroom Gallery." Autostraddle. February 08, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.autostraddle.com/be-part-of-autostraddles-queer-in-the-bedroom-gallery-368165/>.

¹¹³ Laneia. "Be Part of Autostraddle's Queer in the Kitchen Gallery." Autostraddle. February 08, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.autostraddle.com/submit-to-autostraddles-queer-kitchen-gallery-364878/>.

to see if this was the standard definition the website used for queer people. It was not.

The next article I found, in the same vein as the last one, was “Be Part of Autostraddle’s Queer in the Kitchen Gallery.” This article, made by the same individual a month prior to the article discussed above, had a very different definition of queer. This article explained, “A queer person is human who identifies as not straight. If you don’t like the word ‘queer’ just pretend it says the word that you do like – lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, sapiosexual (jk that is not real), gay, faggy, fresh as fuck, etc.”¹¹⁴ This definition not only includes gay men, as the last one did not, but expands the boundaries of queer to anyone who does not identify as straight. As well, by restricting ‘queer’ to only non straight sexualities, it leaves out the very group the previous definition included: non-binary individuals.

What is the impact of these conflicting definitions? Both articles came out in the beginning of 2017. I came to the articles too late to participate in the “Queer in the Kitchen” article. I did, however, want to participate in the “Queer in the Bedroom” gallery. I did not submit a picture to the gallery as I felt that (while yes, I am non binary) I am pass as cisgender.¹¹⁵ I was disenfranchised from participating in the gallery because I thought I did not belong to the group the website was looking for.

¹¹⁴ Laneia. "Be Part of Autostraddle's Queer in the Kitchen Gallery." Autostraddle. February 08, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018.

<https://www.autostraddle.com/submit-to-autostraddles-queer-kitchen-gallery-364878/>.

¹¹⁵ This means that I appear to be male.

My bedroom not being seen on the internet is not of particular importance. What is important is that this case, while minor, shows how restricting the definition of queer can disenfranchise people. By making individuals with certain identities feel like they don't belong by not representing within the boundaries of 'queer', those individuals could be disenfranchised from participating and engaging within the queer community. And it is here that political danger of restricting the definition of the term queer, and Lani Ka'ahumanu's move for inclusion of bisexuality within the queer community, becomes so clearly important. By limiting the definition of queer to certain identities, those who fall outside the limits could be disenfranchised from participation.¹¹⁶

Conclusion: Where is the Line?

Queer Nation, as described above, was a movement by gay and lesbian identified individuals to advocate for their rights. Their goal, as described in their document *Queers Read This*, is for the liberation of gay and lesbian identified individuals. The movement falls into the trap of identity politics discussed above. By reifying their identities as timeless and ahistorical, they remove themselves from the historical context within which the identities and the movement were developed.

¹¹⁶ It is also important to note that it is much more common for those who are not monosexual, cisgender, and/or not white to be made to feel as though they do not belong within the queer community. My experience as feeling excluded as someone who might be read as a cis-white gay male is used here to make a point, not point to a particular trend.

And yet, queer nation invokes the term queer consistently throughout their rhetoric and, to a great extent, helped to spread the reclaimed term queer into mainstream American culture and academia. Herein lies the danger of invoking the term queer in activist groups: it risks reducing the term to specific identity categories while ignoring and invisibilizing other identity groups (bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and more) that would call themselves queer. This invisibilizing more is called erasure. Erasure “refers to the practice of collective indifference that renders certain people and groups invisible.”¹¹⁷

Lani showed that there is power in drawing boundaries around who is and is not included in the term queer. People have fought, and continue to fight, to gain recognition within that identity community. For academics, students, and activists to cast specific boundaries around who is and is not included in the term queer can fly in the face of hard activist work done to achieve recognition within the queer community.

However, it must also be said the struggle around the term queer highlights a problem within identity politics. Specifically, it shows how not only those outside but also those inside of the communities construct identity. Those boundaries have effects on the lives of people, their power and their sense of belonging. It seems against the spirit of identity politics, a politics created around advocating for the rights of the oppressed, to fight about who does and does not belong to the term

¹¹⁷ Parul Sehgal. "Fighting 'Erasure'." *The New York Times*. February 02, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/magazine/the-painful-consequences-of-erasure.html>.

queer. Surely the oppression of the bisexual at the hands of the gay is not the desired end goal of identity politics. But it is where it has led us.

These boundaries are similar to the ones discussed in Chapter 2. By creating exclusive groups that claim the word, individuals who would seek the visibility and political power associated with the term are often excluded and made invisible. The messiness of identity politics generally, coupled with the messiness of the term queer, makes the use of the term queer in activism, relying on identity politics, particularly bogged down with historical and political baggage. This chapter argues that it is the best practice for anyone engaging in identity politics, either in academia or in activist groups, to be clear about the identity groups that they are invoking for their analysis and to avoid the uncritical use of the term queer. This does not mean removing the term queer from activist movements, but instead calls for movements to have a greater self-reflection on their deployment of the term.

Conclusion: Queer Beginnings

This work is titled Queer™ because it interrogates a very particular question: who has ownership of the term queer? The analysis of this question has interrogated the power structures that surround the reiteration of the word queer by academic and political actors. The answer to this question, as has been shown in this work, is not a simple one.

Academics have staked a claim of ownership. Academics have argued over it's meaning, bending and twisting the term in whatever way is useful for their analysis. And yet, for academics, the term queer is rarely more useful than saying clearly whatever implicit meaning the academic wishes the term to fulfill. As well, the power dynamic of an academic group using (reclaimed?) slurs to describe not only groups of people that have not fully reclaimed that slur but also individuals that historically have no association with the term is problematic.

Academics then gifted the claim of ownership of the term queer to their students. The reproduction of the term in universities has a dual impact. First, it encourages the terms use by those of many identities and normalizes the term, despite its many different means to different people. Using our power as educators to encourage straight students to refer to other people and things as queer reinforces the notion that we, in our position of power, get to say that the term is reclaimed while many live a different experience. As well, by reproducing a normalized version of queer thought and identity, we ignore and often erase the complexity of the term.

Activists have also staked a claim to the word. Activists, who use it as an umbrella term and a rallying cry, often do so without critically thinking about whom they are implicitly excluding from their organizations with the rhetoric. In this way, individuals who would identify as queer are marginalized not only from mainstream society but from their identity as well.

The analysis of the use of queer across these dimensions has illuminated the ultimate tension that I have with the term. The inherent problem in queer is that, due to the disparate and paradoxical usage and lack of clear ownership, I (a queer) do not feel comfortable with the (potentially queer, potentially not queer) academic, activist, or student deploying the term as there is no clear distinction of where their political interests stop and mine begin. Deploying my identity for your political gain creates a system in which I do not have ownership of my own identity. Instead, it is used, manipulated, and deployed in ways that, at times, exclude me and/or others from the group.

It is important to note that I am discussing here my personal discomfort. As stated before, this thesis does not attempt to be objective. Instead, it is my academic attempt to explain my discomfort with the proliferation of the term queer as a useful tool for activists, students, and academics. It is also complicated by the fact that I identify myself as queer.

But that is the point. I identify myself as queer. I define what my queerness means to me. The proliferation of these uses of the term queer are often not in line with how I define my queerness for myself. Someone misrepresenting what my identity means to me, whether it be for political protest or as a tool for their

analysis, makes me deeply uncomfortable. And, as seen by Lani Ka'ahumanu, the way queer is used often goes against how many 'queers' understand their own queerness.

I would like to highlight that this thesis does not make any kind of normative claims about how one should or should not identify themselves. This thesis focuses on instances where individuals identify others as queer. If someone, like myself, identifies as queer, that should be celebrated in a way that is appropriate for that persons understanding of their own queerness.

It is because of the deeply personal nature of queerness that I recommend that those who wish to use the term queer think critically before using the term. Is there another word that could be used in its place? A word that would be more accurate and carry less baggage? What would be gained, or lost, by saying clearly what we mean? Is it possible to use the term without creating an inherent power structure that excludes some who would use the term to define themselves? If it is possible to avoid the term, the findings of this thesis suggest doing so. It is better practice as an academic, an activist, a student, and as a person to say clearly what you mean without risking disenfranchising, offending, or unintentionally ridiculing someone.

A final word about this thesis: this work is not the final and definitive document on queer usage. In fact, it is simply the beginning. This work raises a question that I, as a queer academic, feel needs to be addressed by the growing field of queer theory. Again, this is in no way meant to undermine the work done by queer theorists. Instead, it is an attempt to highlight how important our work is. The

work that queer theorists do has a great effect on people's lives. With that responsibility comes the responsibility to be careful with words.

There is much more work to be done and many more power structures surrounding the word queer to explore. This work is not an exhaustive account of the power structures that surround the word queer. An important question raised by this thesis is

“What are additional ways in which power structures are created around the word queer?”

As well, this thesis is limited to mostly the political and political science. Surely there are other dimensions of use of the term queer worth exploring and highlighting beyond the political. Additional important question raised by this thesis is:

“What are the best terms to use to replace the term queer? Do these terms create power structures of their own?”

“Should we not we should call ourselves ‘queer theorists’?”

“Are there other practices in queer theory that create or reproduce power structures? If so, how do we avoid/correct those practices.”

There are still areas that require much exploration. Finally, this work is done with the hope that those who read it might use the analysis here as a launch point for further critical work, be it in queer theory or elsewhere.

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Appendix A

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:	
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson			
Agnis Scot College	N/A	N/A	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Gender Trouble	Zami: A New Spelling of My Name				A Queer Time and Place	X		Black Queer Studies	6	6
George Mason	246	Spring 2014	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Undoing Gender, Imitation and Gender Insubordination		The Epistemology of the Closet				X			4	5
Harvard	183	Fall 2012			A Burst of Light: Essays				What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?			"Quare" Studies, or (almost) everything I know about Queer Studies I learned from my Grandmother	3	3

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:	
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson			
Cliff School of Technology	2000/2030	Fall 2000	History of Sexuality Volume 1										1	1
Macalester College	110	Spring 2014	Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity	Undiagnosing Gender			What's wrong with normal, Sex in Public						3	4
Northeastern	NA	NA	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Undoing Gender, Sexual Traffic: Interview, Imitation and Gender Subordination	Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches	The Epistemology of the Closet	Fear of a Queer Planet			"One Hundred Years of Homosexuality"	Black Queer Studies	7	8	
NYU	N/A	Spring 2012		Gender Trouble		The Epistemology of the Closet	The Trouble with Normal: Sex Politics	Female Masculinity				4	4	

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson		
								cs, and the Ethics of Queer Lie					
Oberin	447	Spring 2012		Imitation and Gender Insubordination, Performativity, precarity, and sexual politics		Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay	What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X, Queer and Then, Sex in Public	What's queer about Queer Studies now, Shame and gay White Masculinity, The queer art of Failure				4	7
Occidental College	186	Spring 2016	Biopolitics and the Carceral Society, Right over life, power over death	Imitation and Gender Insubordination, Performativity, precarity,	The Master's Tools	Queer and Now, Epistemology of the Closet						4	5

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson		
				and sexual politics									
Oregon State	400	Winter 2012	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire		The Epistemology of the Closet		You Cannot Gaga Gaga				4	4
Pitt	2270	Spring 2015	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter, Undoing Gender		The Epistemology of the Closet	Queer and Then, The Trouble with Normal, Sex in Public	What Queer about Queer Studies Now, In a Queer Time and Place, The Queer Art of Failure, Shame and White Gay Masculinity, Female masculinity		How to do a History of Homosexuality, What do Gay Men Want	"Quare" Studies	7	16

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burn ing	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson		
Portland State	360	NA	History of Sexuality Volume 1	"Imitation and Gender Insubordination"		Between Men	Sex in Public					4	4
Rutgers	NA	Fall 2010					Beyond Gay Marriage					1	1
UNC Charlotte	4000/5000	Spring 2015	Power/Knowledge	Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter, Undoing Gender		The Epistemology of the Closet, Tendencies	Queer and Then ?	Female Masculinity, In a Queer Time and Place, What's queer about Queer Studies now, Shame and White gay masculinity, Queer Art of Failure	X	The Normalization of Queer Theory		7	14

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:	
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson			
University of Massachusetts	451	NA	The History of Sexuality Volume 1	Gender Trouble	The Masters tools	The Epistemology of the Closet,	The Trouble with Normal: Sex Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Lie					Black Queer Studies	6	6
University of New Mexico	398	Spring 2007	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter	The Masters tools	The Epistemology of the Closet		Female Masculinity	X				6	7
University of Toronto	1158	Fall 2015	History of Sexuality Volume 1	Imitation and Gender Insubordination	The Erotic as Power				X				4	4
Warwick	372	2016 /17		Bodies that Matter		Queer and Now	Queer and Then	"Technopias: Representing Transgender		Gay Shame			5	6

Colleges	Level	Date Taught	Authors/Works									Total Authors:	Total Sources:	
			Foucault	Butler	Lord e	Sedgwick	Warner	Judith/Jack Halberstam	Paris Burning	Halperin	E Patrick Johnson			
									Bodies in Contemporary Art, In a Queer Time and Place					
Whitman	328	Fall 2012	History of Sexuality Volume 1	X					The Queer Art of Failure	X	X		5	5
		Number of Syllabi that used the author:	14	16	7	12	10	10	10	6	5	5	Average:	
		Percent:	70	80	35	60	50	50	50	30	25	25	4.25	5.5