(RE)CONCEPTUALIZING THE ROLE OF
IDENTITY IN RHETORIC:
QUEER THEORY AND
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

DISSERTATION

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* * * * *

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Contemporary rhetorical theory, like other late twentieth century interpretive/critical theory, has been forced to confront its limitations. In particular, many theorists have been critical of the inability of mainstream theories to account for the diverse voices in our culture.

While many theories have been developed to help us to better understand marginalized groups, these theories have relied upon an essential notion of identity to explain how these collectives mobilize and function. Because their identities differ from the confines of these essential categories, many individuals are excluded. In recent years, the queer movements and queer theory have emerged in an effort to develop both activism and theory that is more widely inclusive of individual differences. That is, activists and theorists rely on a notion of identity based upon differences rather than similarities. The queer movements and queer theory are unique in that they not only have provided an important critique of a mainstream that oppresses those who are different, but they have launched a radical critique on other identity movements.

Queer theory and activism are based upon a number of assumptions. First, they challenge traditional essentialist notions of identity. Second, they reject assimilation as the goal of confrontational rhetoric. Third, they challenge both identity categories in general,
and sexual and gender categories in particular. Fourth, they reject the notion that hierarchy is inevitable. Fifth, and finally, queer theory and activism are activist in nature; they work from the premise that tangible changes in dominant views are necessary, and that mere critique is insufficient.

The assumptions of queer theory are useful in terms of how we understand social movement rhetoric. Specifically, queer theory provides a unique view of identity that advances our understanding of how individuals mobilize as collective groups, how a social movement organization functions, and how rhetorical action is taken both within the group and toward the dominant group. Queer theory provides a useful link between social movement theory in both communication and sociology, and advances these theories by proposing a unique view of identity construction.

Finally, the assumptions of queer theory provide a useful framework for rhetorical criticism as well as pedagogy. Queer critics focus on difference, oppositional readings of texts, and individual identity constructions through discourse. Queer pedagogies emphasize difference in the classroom, highlight individual experience, challenge traditional power relationships, and alter reading and thinking practices in the classroom. Queer theory provides an opportunity to build the communities of difference that are becoming increasingly important in our increasingly diverse world.
Dedicated to the courageous men and women living with HIV/AIDS.
They are evidence that there are angels on earth.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Queerness in its most distinctive forms shakes the ground on which gay and lesbian politics have been built, taking apart the ideas of a "sexual minority" and a "gay community," indeed of "gay" and "lesbian" and even "man" and "woman." It builds on central difficulties of identity-based organizing: the instability of identities both individual and collective, their made-up yet necessary character. (Gamson, 1996, p. 412)

Developing New Understandings of Identity Construction and Activism

Contemporary rhetorical theory, like much late 20th century interpretive/critical theory, has been forced to confront its limitations. In particular, theorists have been increasingly critical of the limited perspectives that are represented in mainstream rhetorical theories. This criticism is, by no means, unique to rhetorical studies. In fact, the academy in general has been subject to widespread criticism for the limitations of mainstream theories to adequately account for--and, indeed, to represent--the diverse voices in our culture.

In recent years, there has been much energy devoted to the rhetorics of various marginalized groups. These theories have a number of goals, but perhaps the most important of these goals is to critique mainstream theory for silencing the voices of non-dominant groups. In light of these critiques, contemporary rhetorical theorists must
critically re-think both rhetorical theory and the implications of rhetorical practice.

Feminist rhetorical theories, for example, emphasize the role of gender in discourse. These theories focus not only on women’s discourse, but on the ways in which all discourse constructs gender differences. Feminist rhetorics, then, serve to empower women by interrogating the constructions of gender, but they are also critical of mainstream theories for the differences that are not considered (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Carter & Spitzack, 1989; Foss & Foss, 1991). In addition, scholars have addressed issues of race (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991; hooks, 1984; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Scott & Brockriede, 1969). To a lesser degree, scholars have also addressed issues of class, although these issues tend to be incorporated with research on gender and race.

A number of important issues are raised by these critical theories. Specifically, questions pertaining to essentialism versus constructionism, nature versus nurture, and universal versus particular are raised by theorists. It is important to realize that these theories pose a fundamental challenge to traditional thinking by arguing that all human beings are not the same, and that our individual differences profoundly influence our communication. Finally, these theories contend that it is not sufficient to "add X and stir." Rather, in order to take the differences of human beings seriously requires that rhetorical theory change in fundamental ways.

To a large extent, sexual identity has been neglected in communication research, and particularly in rhetorical studies. There have only been a handful of articles in the last twenty years that have considered sexual identity to be a significant rhetorical issues
(Brummet, 1981; Darsey, 1981; Darsey, 1991; Gearhart, 1981; Ringer, 1994). As Chesebro (1981) points out, "[f]rom the time the Speech Communication Association (SCA) began publishing academic essays, in 1915, until the beginning of 1980, only two essays explored the way in which homosexuality could be conceived in communication terms as a communication system" (p. xiii). Since then, most of the work in communication on sexual identity has appeared in two edited volumes (Chesebro, 1981, and Ringer, 1994). This work, with a few exceptions in the last few years (Brooke, 1996; Corey, 1996; Slagle, 1995), has approached sexual identity from a relatively traditional and conservative approach. In other words, these works have been based on what I term liberation theory.

There is an important distinction that I draw between gay/lesbian liberation theory and the more recent emergence of, so-called, queer theory. In general, the liberation movements have sought to allow gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals participation within the dominant system. Liberation theories have generally argued that sexual difference is not particularly important, that all human beings are basically the same regardless of sexual identity, and that gays and lesbians should be treated no differently than other people on the basis of their sexual identities. I discuss these and other distinctions between liberation theory and queer theory at length in chapter two. In this chapter, I focus on the emergence of queer theory as a postmodern phenomenon. The emergence of queer theory is directly related to the rhetoric of social movements; not only is queer theory a product of activism, but it helps us develop a view of activism that has not been considered by contemporary social movement studies in communication.
Identity movements are nothing new. Indeed, they have probably existed for nearly as long as human beings have inhabited this planet. To the extent that there have always been people who are different from the mainstream, and the mainstream rejects their ideas, emphasizes that difference is undesirable, and that non-normative worldviews are destructive to society, identity has served as an significant site for political action. Nevertheless, in the last half of the twentieth century, we have witnessed an increasing number of identity movements play a central role in political and social discourse. The feminist movement(s), the black civil rights movement, and the gay liberation movement have served as particularly influential and notable examples of political mobilization around identity. More recently, the queer movements has played a visible role in political action. The queer movements are unique in that they not only have provided an important critique of a mainstream that oppresses those who are different, but they have launched a further critique on other identity movements.

**Gay Liberation and Queer Activism**

In recent years, a new social movement has emerged in the struggle to end sexual oppression—a movement generally called the queer movement. Queer Nation is the most visible and most notorious of the new queer movements. Rather than relying on the assimilation model of liberation theory, the queer movements are based on the assumption that queer individuals are unique and that simply because queers are different does not justify oppression by the dominant, heterosexual mainstream. In short, while the liberation movement has tended to strive for assimilation within the mainstream by arguing that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are essentially no different from heterosexuals, those in the
queer movements have argued that queers are different from the mainstream and that these differences should be celebrated, not silenced. In other words, while the liberation movements have constructed, although unintentionally, a unitary identity, the queer movements consciously have avoided imposing an essentializing identity upon members of the movement.

The queer movement is unique in that it avoids essentialism on two separate levels. First, while liberationists have argued for years that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are essentially no different from heterosexuals, the new activists argue that queers are different but that marginalization is not justified on the basis of these differences. Second, queer activists avoid essentializing strategies within the movement itself. In other words, while liberation theory has been based largely on the notion of a "gay essence," queer activists have problematized the meaning of queer.

Queer Nation and the queer movements in general have appealed to activists who have felt marginalized within the gay and lesbian liberation movements. These movements have been criticized for constructing an identity—with an accompanying ideology—that is essentially white and middle-class. The gay liberation movement has been criticized for being exclusive of women, which resulted in the formation of separate lesbian movements. Furthermore, bisexual men and women have felt excluded from the gay and lesbian movements, which tend to be defined in terms of same-sex attraction. Because the notion of queer identity is defined in terms of differences, the essentialism of the earlier movements is not a problem for the queer movements. At the least, this essentialism is significantly reduced. I elaborate on the rejection of essentialism in chapters two and
three. As Fuss (1989) notes, “[d]econstruction dislocates the understanding of identity as self-presence and offers, instead, a view of identity as difference” (p. 103).

Admittedly, some other identity movements may recognize diversity among members of the movements. The queer movements, though, are unique in that they have taken this acknowledgment of difference to a unique extreme. Rather than simply acknowledging that differences exist (while essential similarities still exist), queer theorists and activists define identity in terms of difference. In other words, the queer movements are unique in that they mobilize around the notion that individual differences put members in a similar position socially and politically.

Furthermore, the queer movement rejects assimilation as the goal of activism and emancipatory social theory. In other words, for queers the purpose of challenging an oppressive political and social structure is not to simply be accepted. Instead, queer theorists and activists aim to challenge and destroy traditional notions of what it means to be normal. Put more simply, queer theorists and activists celebrate individual differences rather than focusing on the things that human beings have in common. As Seidman (1993) explains:

Although many in the mainstream homophile movement described homosexuals as a minority, this difference was not celebrated. They did not promote the building of an autonomous homosexual culture. Instead they interpreted the minority condition of homosexuals as an unfortunate consequence of social discrimination. They sought to abolish the homosexual as a distinct social identity. They intended social assimilation. (p. 111)

Seidman argues that from roughly 1969-1973, the early liberation movements directly challenged the thinking of the homophile movement. In particular, these activists
"contested the notion of homosexuality as a condition of a segment of humanity; repudiated the idea of homosexuality as symptomatic of psychic or social inferiority; and rejected a politics of assimilation" (p. 111). In the early years of the liberation movement, the goals of both activists and theorists were directed toward rejecting dualistic thinking in terms of sexuality. In other words, the early liberationists sought to "institute a sexual regime in which sexuality is not defined by a mutually exclusive gender preference" (Seidman, 1993, p. 113).

The thinking of the early liberationists was somehow lost over the years, however. In particular, Seidman (1993) documents a shift in thinking between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s. At this time groups began to form that were relatively gender specific. Seidman explains that a "gay subculture was created largely by and for men. Moreover, many lesbians either identified with the women's movement or with the lesbian separatist project of forging a womansculture" (p. 116). The gay male project was oriented towards what might be called a rights discourse. In other words, "the dominant agenda of the male-dominated gay culture became community building and winning civil rights" (Seidman, 1993, p. 117). Gay liberationists, then, have mobilized around an essential notion of gay identity, and have focused on the rights of gays to participate in both the political and social life of the mainstream. Put another way, they downplayed the importance of sexual identity by insisting that one's sexuality is not a factor in how human beings communicate and behave.

While the emphasis on community building had a parallel in the lesbian feminist culture, lesbian feminists did not share the interest in gay rights. Seidman explains that
"whereas gay men represented themselves as an ethnic group oriented toward assimilation, lesbian feminists presented themselves as the vanguard of a gender-separatist politic" (p. 117). In other words, separatists took a radically different tact than the gay (male) liberationists. Rather than seeking acceptance by the mainstream, the separatists firmly rejected assimilation as a goal of activism. Instead, they focused on the importance of women coming together around a shared identity. As a result, lesbian separatism is defined by essential notions of identity. Queer theorists are critical of such an approach because it does not account for individual differences and shifting identities. The major problem with such an approach is that it excludes women who do not fit into the defined essential categories.

**Queer Theory and Postmodernism**

In recent years, partly as the result of queer activism, a relatively “new” branch of social criticism and activism has emerged. Scholars from a diverse range of disciplines, concerned with the absence of sexuality in mainstream theory, have begun to address the issues surrounding sexual identities. Collectively, these theories are referred to as queer theory. Queer theorists seek to illuminate the ways in which sexuality is a fundamental influence in the ways that human beings behave and communicate.

In this section, I will address the emergence of queer theory in the academy generally, and the influence of activism on queer theory in scholarship. To understand the fundamental ideas of both queer theory and activism, it is important to recognize the conditions that have led to the emergence of this radical new approach. I will discuss, therefore, the fact that queer theory is a reaction to: (1) an oppressive, heterosexist
mainstream, and (2) an approach to theory that focuses on social assimilation as its goal and has emphasized an essential notion of identity in order to foster collective activity.

Queer theory is generally understood as a postmodern development in theory. The range of theories that are referred to as postmodern, at the most basic level, are reactions to the discourses of modernity. The theoretical discourses of modernity emphasized rationality as the foundation of systematic knowledge. Best and Kellner (1991) explain that for modernists, "[r]eason was deemed competent to discover adequate theoretical and practical norms upon which systems of thought and action could be built and society could be restructured" (p. 2).

The construction of modernity, while undeniably productive in terms of scientific and industrial progress, produced a system that oppresses any thinking that is not within the mainstream. Furthermore, modernism focuses on essential notions of what it means to belong to a particular group.¹ This is problematic for individuals who do not easily fit into one category or another. Best and Kellner (1991) note:

[M]odernity produced untold suffering and misery for its victims, ranging from the peasantry, proletariat, and artisans oppressed by capitalistic industrialization to the exclusion of women in the public sphere, to the genocide of imperialist colonization. Modernity also has produced a set of disciplinary institutions, practices, and discourses which legitimate its modes of domination and control. (p. 3)

Postmodern theories are a reaction to the systems of domination that are created through modernity. These theorists claim that the need for new ways of thinking about that world has come about, in part, because of the development of complex technologies and the proliferation of the mass media. Theorists of postmodernity contend that
"technologies such as computers and media, new forms of knowledge, and changes in the socio-economic system are producing a postmodern social transformation" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p.3). Postmodern theorists claim that these processes have led to increased cultural fragmentation and modes of experience (Baudrillard, 1983; Baudrillard, 1984; Lyotard, 1984).

Postmodern theorists, in their rejection of the totalizing thinking characteristic of modern theory, are critical of the assumption that theories are a reflection of reality. Instead, postmodern thinkers assert that "theories at best provide partial perspectives on their objects, and that all cognitive representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 4).

Most postmodern theorists are critical of macroperspectives that are used to describe the world. Instead, these theorists favor microperspectives to describe local phenomena (Lyotard, 1984). Furthermore, as Lyotard (1984) explains, dissent with modern notions of reality helps us to account for, and be sensitive to, diverse voices in our society:

Consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. (p. 75)

Best and Kellner (1991) further explain that "[k]nowledge is produced, in Lyotard's view, by dissent, by putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or agreeing to a consensus" (p. 166).
The goals of queer theory are entirely consistent with those of postmodernity. In particular, queer theory raises challenges to totalizing theory, entrenched values, and essential identity categories. In line with postmodern theories, queer theorists view identity as fractured and individual. As Donald Morton (1996) explains:

Most currently available anthologies on queer theory . . . begin with the premise that their approach to queer studies--as a development taking place in the (post)modern moment and enabled by (post)modern theory --represents a decisive and radical advance over modernism (and its precursors), which has always assigned questions of desire and sexuality to a merely secondary status in social and intellectual inquiry. (p. 1)

Queer theorists, instead, bring issues of sexuality--issues often considered private and personal--to the fore through critical inquiry. Morton explains that "[a]s--if not the--leading element in this development, queer theory . . . is seen as making an advance by opening up a new space for the subject of desire, a space in which sexuality becomes primary" (p. 1).

The postmodern turn in queer studies is significant because implicit in this move is a rejection of the categories and hierarchies that are created through modernistic thinking. In particular, the binary oppositions that ultimately ensure oppression are displaced in postmodern conceptions. Indeed, the argument that queer theory advances a new binary opposition--normal/queer, or non-queer/queer--is valid. The key issue to keep in mind, here, is that because queer is not an essential category, the problems associated with totalization of identity are averted with queer theory. The result of this displacement is that the very concept of identity is problematized. Seidman (1993) argues about poststructuralism generally that "[i]mplicit in this subversion of identity is a celebration of
liminality, of the spaces between or outside structure, a kind of anarchistic championing of 'pure' freedom from all constraints and limits" (p. 133).

In terms of the emergence of queer theory and activism, one must understand the distinction between the gay and lesbian liberation movements and the more recent queer movements. In general, people in the liberation movements have sought to allow gay men and lesbians participation within the dominant system. I certainly do not mean to deny that liberation theory has made significant contributions for sexual minorities. Indeed, it is precisely this early work that has made queer theory a possibility. Whereas liberation theory has explicitly reified sexual identity and gender categories (Altman, 1982; Chesebro, 1994; Chesebro, Cragan & McCullough, 1981; Darsey, 1981; Darsey, 1994; DeVito, 1981; Ehrlich, 1981; Foss, 1994; Gamson, 1996; Hemphill, 1991; Kennedy & Davis, 1993; Moraga, 1983; Morin & Garfinkle, 1981; Nogle, 1981; Phelan, 1993; Reid-Pharr, 1993, Sears, 1987; Seidman, 1993; Seidman, 1994), queer theory is a progressive move toward inclusivity and the celebration of differences. In other words, the recent emergence of queer theory and activism are a reaction to the more conservative approach to framing identity of the liberationists. More broadly, in fact, queer theory is a reaction to other late 20th century identity political movements that have generally relied on essential identity constructions in order to form a cohesive group for political action.

Queer theorists challenge a number of assumptions of mainstream theory and identity politics (gay liberation theory, in particular). First, queer theorists problematize gender and sexual identity categories in ways that liberation theorists do not. While queer theorists provide explicit critique of gender, many theorists argue that sex is also
problematic (e.g. Bornstein, 1995). Second, queer theorists raise a fundamental challenge to hierarchies that are constructed by both mainstream as well as in liberation theory. Third, queer theorists challenge the assumption that sexual identity is a "private" matter that is not related to our "public" personae. Fourth, queer theorists challenge the "heteronormativity" in mainstream theory. Fifth, queer theorists challenge the essentialism that exists in mainstream and liberation theory. Finally, queer theorists challenge the assimilationist strategies that are both implicit and explicit in liberation theory. Each of these challenges are significant, and they ultimately have important implications for rhetorical theory. Queer theory has an explicitly activist agenda. Queer theorists argue that it is not enough to point out that oppression and domination exist; instead, a major goal of queer theory is to point to the potential for progressive change in the social structure. In chapter two, I discuss the assumptions of queer theorists at length.

In the third chapter, I provide a discussion of social movement theory, including a review of the scholarship on collective identity and mobilization. The bulk of this literature is from both communication and sociological studies. I believe that communication scholars interested in social movements would benefit from a serious consideration of the sociological literature, but I also believe that sociological theory suffers because sociologists, for the most part, have ignored the communication literature on the persuasive nature of social movements.

In chapters four and five, I provide two specific rhetorical applications of queer theory. In other words, while I believe that queer theory is a potentially useful approach for understanding movements, I also believe that it provides a framework that can help us
to understand rhetorical processes in general. Specifically, in chapter four, I discuss the uses of queer theory for rhetorical practice and rhetorical analysis. This discussion is supplemented with an application of the theory to a variety of cultural artifacts, including an extended analysis of a "mainstream" film intended for children. I discuss at length in chapter five the application of queer theory in the classroom. Specifically, I am interested in what a queer perspective means for both teaching and learning.

Finally, chapter six provides a discussion of the heuristic contributions of this work. Specifically, while most queer theory focuses specifically on issues of sexuality (and, indeed, this dissertation is no exception), the implications of queer theory are much broader. That is, queer theory, I believe, is useful in understanding how difference of any kind is constructed and negotiated with a mainstream that disregards and discourages diverse perspectives.
Notes

1. Best and Kellner (1991) further explain the totalizing nature of modern theory:

Modern theory--ranging from the philosophical project of Descartes, through the Enlightenment, to the social theory of Comte, Marx, Weber, and others--is criticized for its search for a foundation of knowledge, for its universalizing and totalizing claims, for its hubris to supply apodictic truth, and for its allegedly fallacious rationalism. (p. 4)

2. The most obvious way that sexual oppression is constructed is evident in terms of the heterosexual/homosexual dualism. As with other binary oppositions, the first term in the pair is privileged, while the latter is disprivileged. This dualism is particularly significant because when heterosexuality is seen as the norm, homosexuality is seen as non-normative and, therefore, wrong. The terms heterosexual and homosexual rely on each other in important ways. Diana Fuss (1991) argues that "the denotation of any term is always dependent on what is exterior to it (heterosexuality, for example, typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality)" (p. 1).

3. In this case, I have used the terms gay men and lesbians exclusively. This is not an oversight on my part, and it should not be viewed as a lack of inclusiveness on my part. The liberation movements, by and large, have not been inclusive of all sexual differences (e.g. bisexuals, transsexuals, etc.).

4. While the sociology literature has discussed the role of collective identities and mobilization, this literature is not without problems either. In particular, these theories rely on an essential notion of identity in order to foster mobilization and cohesion. Queers deny that such concrete identity constructions exist or are even possible.

5. In many rhetorical studies, sociological theorists are mentioned, but generally these references are made only in passing. A notable exception is the Simons, Mechling, and Schreir's (1984) review of social movement literature in the Handbook of Communication and Rhetorical Theory. In this essay, sociological theories are discussed at length, including the potential utility of greater theoretical interaction between the relatively distinct communication and sociology literature. Since that essay appeared, however, the sociological theories have been notably absent from rhetorical studies of social movements.
CHAPTER 2

QUEER THEORY AS A PERSPECTIVE

Queer theory, as I argued in the previous chapter, provides scholars a new perspective to understand communication. In particular, queer theory presents a fresh approach to understanding the role of identity in discourse that has not been considered by other perspectives. In this chapter, I discuss the assumptions of queer theory that I mentioned in the first chapter. The assumptions of queer theory are significant in terms of understanding queer rhetorical practice and criticism, as well as queer pedagogical strategies.

Problematizing Gender and Sexual Categories

Human beings, generally, have a need to understand the world in terms that are as clear and concise as possible. Most people have a need to be able to understand the world in terms of particular categories. Kate Bornstein (1995) explains:

But the need for a recognizable identity, and the need to belong to a group of people with a similar identity --these are driving forces in our culture, and nowhere is this more evident than in the areas of gender and sexuality. Hence the clear division between fashion statements of male and female, between the fashions of queer and straight. (pp. 3-4)
Queer theorists problematize gender and sexual identity, or sexual orientation, categories. This is a necessary challenge, because, as I discuss below, it is one of the primary ways that queer theorists avoid essentialism in theory (Berlant & Freeman, 1993; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1991; Butler, 1993; Case, 1991; de Lauretis, 1991; Fuss, 1989; Fuss, 1991; Hopkins, 1992; Morrison, 1992; Seidman, 1993; Smyth, 1992; Warner, 1993). Judith Butler (1990), for example, refers to this as the "subversion of identity" (p. iii). Rather than arguing that there are essentially two genders (masculine and feminine), and two sexual orientations (homosexual and heterosexual), queer theorists argue that a whole range of possibilities exist both within and outside of these categories. Although queer theorists tend to emphasize and criticize socially constructed gender roles, some theorists have argued that biological notions of sex should also be open to interrogation (Bornstein, 1995). Traditional understandings of male and female, for example, do not adequately describe the experience of transsexuals.

Queer theorists work to disrupt the heterosexual-homosexual binary. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) explains that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (p. 1). Queer theorists attempt to overcome the binary by introducing ambiguity into understandings of sexuality. Margaret Morrison (1992) points out that the word queer implies sexuality, yet it does so without "pinpointing single and stable, specific, homo/hetero sexualities and genderings" (p. 13). These categories (gay, lesbian, straight, heterosexual, homosexual, etc.), many people have found, are incapable
of describing all of the forms of sexual experience that many individuals confront in their lives. In other words, the way that some individuals experience their sexuality cannot be placed into a "homo" or "hetero" category. As Cherry Smyth (1992) notes:

The coining of the word "homosexual" in 1870 quickly led to the development of a strict binary homo-hetero opposition which still tyrannises notions of sexual orientation, despite the recognition of its increasing inadequacy to identify and describe sexual practice. (p. 12)

One of problems that queer theorists see with traditional views of sexual orientations, is that they are based on the biological gender (sex) of the participants. Bornstein (1995) explains that "sexual orientation/preference is based in this culture solely on the gender of one's partner of choice. Not only do we confuse the two words, we make them dependent on one another" (p. 32).1 Because of the connections that we make between sex and sexual orientation, we create a limited taxonomy into which we can classify the world. Specifically, this taxonomy includes: (1) a heterosexual model, in which a biological male is involved with a biological female, (2) a gay male model, in which two biological men are involved with each other, (3) a lesbian model, in which two biological women are involved with one another, and (4) a bisexual model, in which biological men and women could be involved with either biological men or women (Bornstein, 1995). Bornstein, a transsexual, is critical of these models on two levels. First, they leave out a number of possible variations between the categories. As she explains:

Variants to these gender-based relationship dynamics would include heterosexual female with gay male, gay male with lesbian woman, lesbian woman with heterosexual woman, gay male with bisexual male, and so forth. People involved in these variants know that each dynamic is different from the other. A lesbian
involved with another lesbian, for example, is a very different relationship than that of a lesbian involved with a bisexual woman, and that's distinct from being a lesbian woman involved with a heterosexual woman. (p. 33)

These variations not only raise questions about sexual acts, but they also raise interesting communication questions as well. In other words, how does each of these possibilities influence the ways that we interact with one another? Desire has a profound impact on our communication most obviously in terms of intimate relationships. However, our desires also play an important role in other encounters that we have as well. For example, a queer male and a heterosexual male are likely to have a different relationship than two heterosexual men. Bornstein, however, levels a second criticism of traditional models of sexual identity because of their reliance on the biological sex of the sexual partner. She notes that "[w]hat these variants have in common is that each of these combinations forms its own clearly recognizable dynamic, and none of these are acknowledged by the dominant cultural binary of sexual orientation: heterosexuality/ homosexuality" (p. 33).

Reliance on the heterosexual/homosexual binary is also problematic because it minimizes the experiences of individuals who place emphasis on aspects of sexuality other than the biological sex of their partner. Bornstein (1995) explains that placing an emphasis on the sex of sexual partners

results in minimizing, if not completely dismissing, other dynamic models of a relationship which could be more important than gender and are often more telling about the real nature of someone's desire. There are so many factors on which we could base sexual orientation. (p. 33)

Queer theorists must look beyond traditional biological conceptions of sexual orientation.

Queer theory not only challenges traditional social constructions of gender, but in order to
avoid exclusivity it must challenge biological notions of sex as the basis for sexual identity labels, as well. Bornstein's point that biological models are too limiting is significant, and she points out examples of models that are not based on biological gender. For example, other possible models that Bornstein suggests might include: Butch/Femme models, Top/Bottom models, Butch/Butch models, Femme/Femme models, Triad (or more) models, Human/Animal models, Adult/Child models, Same-aged models, Parent/Child models, Multiple partners models, Able-Bodied models, Differently-abled Bodies models, Reproductive models, Owner/Slave models, Monogamous models, and Non-Monogamous models. The possibilities, literally, are limited only by one's imagination. In fact, Bornstein jests that the reader "[t]ry making up a list of ways in which sexual preference or orientation could be measured, and then add to that list (or subtract from it) every day for a month, or a year (or for the rest of your life). Could be fun!" (p. 35).

As I have already noted, queer theorists and activists strive to specifically subvert both gender and sex categories. Judith Butler (1990, 1991) argues that genders are, in fact, performative, and that we should strive for the "subversion of identity" in both theory and practice. Gender is not the stable category that many believe. Instead, gender categories, according to Butler, are not stable--they change over time. The "subversion of identity" is important, because as Butler (1991) points out, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structure or as the rallying points for the liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (pp. 13-14). This is a problem, Butler argues, because by relying on these normalizing categories to rally around, activists and theorists reinscribe the same oppressive
constructions that they are fighting in the first place. Sue-Ellen Case (1991) agrees with this view, and argues that while gay and lesbian liberation theory could potentially change, "for now, I would contend that both gay male and lesbian theory reinscribe sexual difference, to some extent, in their gender specific constructions" (p. 2).

Kate Bornstein (1995) agrees with Butler's view that traditional constructions of gender are overly restrictive. She explains that a "particularly insidious aspect about gender--our gender system here in the West, and perhaps for the planet as a whole--is that it is an oppressive class system made all the more dangerous by the belief that it is an entirely natural state of affairs" (p. 105). The point that Bornstein and Butler emphasize is that when gender and sex are closely tied together, our categories become problematic and restrictive. Indeed, Butler (1990) argues:

If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (p. 7)

Queer theorists see gender categories as exclusive because they are closely wedded to biological sex, and, therefore, they are inadequate in terms of accounting for the experiences of all people. This is true for Bornstein who explains:

I identify as neither male nor female, and now that my lover is going through his gender change, it turns out I'm neither straight nor gay. What I've found as a result of this borderline life is that the more fluid my identity has become, and the less demanding my own need to belong to the camps of male, female, gay or straight, the more playful and less dictatorial my fashion has become. (p. 4)

Gender categories, in Butler's (1990) view, are problematic particularly when sexuality is understood in terms of gender. In other words, mainstream theory as well as traditional
gay and lesbian theory tends to construct categories of sexual identity based on biological sex choices (e.g. male-male, female-female, female-male) which results in specific identity categories (e.g. homosexuality and heterosexuality). Sue-Ellen Case (1991) explains that "[q]ueer theory, unlike lesbian or gay male theory is not gender specific" (p. 2).

Furthermore, rather than accepting the mainstream view that genders are essential categories, Butler (1990) argues that gender is constructed, instead, through repeated social performances:

Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 140)

For queer theorists, then, identities are constructed through performative actions, and because of the tenuousness, identities are constantly shifting. The fluidity of identity is significant, because, as Nomaste (1996) explains:

This stress on the multiplicity of identity expands contemporary sexual politics beyond a stagnant hetero/homo opposition. It provides people with more choices in how they define themselves, and insists on the diversity within communities of the sexually marginalized. (p. 206)

The interrogation of gender categories is significant, because if individual sexual identities are constructed independent of traditional gender categories "new" sexual possibilities are exposed. Of course, these possibilities already existed in sexual practice, but they have not been theorized, and in many cases, they have not been named (at least by theorists). To be sure, queer theory goes beyond the traditional gendered view of sexuality, and views sexuality as much broader than simple sex/gender choices. This is not
to say that gender and sex are not a part of sexuality; it is to say that sex and gender are not the only aspect of sexuality, and that sex and gender are not always the primary aspect of sexuality for individuals. In other words, queer theorists are interested in decentering stringent identity categories. Nomaste (1996) explains that “[b]y unsettling much of the lesbian and gay response to heterosexism, and by suggesting that many non-heterosexual positions are available, such activism focuses its attention on displacing heterosexuality, homosexuality, and the relations between the two” (p. 206).

In addition to challenging gender categories, queer theorists and activists actively reject traditional sexual identity categories. An anonymous leaflet, *Queer Power Now*, distributed in London in 1991, boldly explains:

*Queer means to fuck with gender [and sex and sexual identity]. There are straight queers, bi-queers, tranny [sic] queers, lez queers, fag queers, SM queers, fisting queers in every single street in this apathetic little country of ours.* (In Smyth, 1992, p. 17)

One of the most obvious ways that gender is made problematic in queer circles is through the use of camp as a rhetorical strategy. In chapter four, I provide a discussion of camp as rhetorical discourse. For now, I should point out that camp confronts traditional gender roles and traditional sexual identities head-on. Meyer (1994) explains that camp has emerged as "a suppressed and denied oppositional critique embodied in the signifying practices that processually constitute queer identities" (p. 1). Furthermore, according to Meyer, "[c]amp refers to strategies and tactics of queer parody" (p. 9).

Certainly, also, transvestites and transsexuals are examples of the subversion of gender and sexual identity (and, indeed, biological sex in the case of transsexuals). In
addition to transsexuals and transvestites, though, deconstructing gender categories is beneficial to anyone who does not fit into traditional categories. Patrick Hopkins (1992) refers to such people as "gender traitors." He explains that a "gender traitor can be thought of as anyone who violates the 'rule' of gender identity/gender performance, i.e. someone who rejects or appears to reject the criteria by which the genders are differentiated" (p. 114).

Breaking down traditional gender constructions is significant, because the gendered construction of sexual identity categories serves to oppress many individuals at different levels. Many scholars have argued that sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia are closely related precisely because gender, sex, and sexual identity are closely wedded concepts (Blumenfeld, 1992a; Blumenfeld, 1992b; Hopkins, 1992; Pharr, 1988; Warner, 1993). Suzanne Pharr (1988) contends, for example, that homophobia is a "weapon of sexism." She explains that:

Homophobia works effectively as a weapon of sexism because it is joined with a powerful arm, heterosexism. Heterosexism creates a climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm. . . . Heterosexism and homophobia work together to enforce compulsory heterosexuality and that bastion of patriarchal power, the nuclear family. (pp. 16-17)

In addition, Warren J. Blumenfeld (1992a) argues that patriarchy forces all people into rigid gender roles. He explains that "[g]ender roles maintain the sexist structure of society, by casting such epithets as faggot, dyke, and homo at people who step outside designated gender roles" (p. 24). These gender roles serve to oppress not only queers, but
also heterosexual women and some heterosexual men (e.g. a heterosexual male hair
stylist).

Rejection of Hierarchy

Many theories based upon the politics of location (race, gender, class, sexuality,
etc.), attempt to reject hierarchy on some level. Unfortunately, most of these theories
have unwittingly reinforced hierarchy by reinscribing essential identity categories. Queer
theorists firmly reject all kinds of hierarchy. This is true of hierarchies that are based on
sexual difference in particular, but this idea extends to other hierarchies as well. As Meyer
(1994) explains, "[t]he history of queer practices . . . is a critical maneuver not limited to
sexualities, but is one that has valuable applications for marginal social identities in
general" (p. 3). Queer theorists envision a world in which hierarchy does not exist on any
level, at least ideally. In part, queer theorists seek to dismantle the hierarchical
assumptions of the mainstream in a way that others theories have not been able to do.
Indeed, queer theory, because it provides a unique view of difference and because of its
rejections of essential identity constructions, challenges the mainstream at all sites of
difference. This challenge is most obvious in terms of sexuality, but extends to other sites
of difference as well (i.e., gender, race, class, etc.). In addition, queer theory posits
challenges to hierarchy that are not possible with traditional liberation theory, or any other
theory that constructs specific identity categories. Because liberation theory reinscribes
sexual categories, these theories cannot help but create a hierarchy where some categories
are privileged over others. In other words, traditional liberation theory tends to accept
categories such as homosexual-heterosexual or gay-straight. Because heterosexuality is
the norm in most cultures, homosexual is the displaced term in the binary. Although the
liberationists have argued that homosexuals should be allowed to participate equally,
because homosexuality is non-normative, the group is inevitably oppressed. Queer theory
overcomes this because queer theorists engage, uncover, and challenge the differences that
exist among all individuals; sexual differences as well as other types of difference are
potential targets for queer critique.

Queer theorists must be careful to consider all differences that help to construct an
individual identity. Butler (1990), for example, argues that identity politics often fail to
recognize the larger picture by ignoring other significant sites of difference. She explains:

The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in
which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the "specificity" of
the feminine is once and again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically
and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of
power relations that both constitute "identity" and make the singular notion of
identity a misnomer.7 (p. 4)

Indeed, queer theorists seek to interrogate all identity categories in order to challenge and
upset traditional notions of what it has meant to belong to a particular group. As a
guiding ideal, queer theorists hope to make hierarchy not only ineffectual, but, in fact,
impossible through the interrogation of categories. Queer theorists envision a world
where most differences do not translate into power relationships. Obviously, power
relationships do not simply disappear in a queer world (for example, parent-child
relationships), but the challenge of power relationships in general provides an important
foundation for queer critique. In the case of parent-child relations, for example, a queer
critique would help to illuminate the ways that the power in the relationship might go in
both directions. In other words, a queer critique would emphasize the contributions that both parent and child make to the relationship based on their different identities. Put another way, queer theory would likely contend that both the child and the parent have unique attributes that are potentially beneficial to both parties in the relationship. It is worth repeating here that such a theoretical position is an ideal for queer theorists. Indeed, even queer theory itself produces a hierarchical power structure. This is largely the result of operating within a social and political context that disprivileges non-normative identities. In a sense, then, queer theory sets up a hierarchy by arguing that celebrating difference is preferable to celebrating similarities and conformity to the norm. Furthermore, at least ideally, this view of difference, while a site of power for queer theorists and activists, does not translate into a world where one difference is "better" than any other differences.

Sexuality and Privacy

Queer theory raises a fundamental challenge to the idea that sexuality, or sexual identity in the broadest sense, is a "private" matter that is not appropriate for public discussion. Many mainstream theorists argue that discussions of sexuality are best left to the bedroom. While liberation theory has made great strides in challenging the assumption that sexuality is a private issue, these theories have not completely avoided the problem. Specifically, gay liberation theory argues that while "gay" is a distinct category, this categorization doesn't mean that "gays" function any differently in the world than "straights" (except, of course, in terms of sexual behavior and partner choice). The difference between "gay" and "straight," in the view of liberation theory, is what goes on
in the bedroom. Queer theory makes a radical departure from this view. Queer theorists contend that there is a whole range of sexual differences, and that sexuality is much more than simply a bedroom issue.

Queer theorists resist the notion that sexual identity is simply based on sexual behavior, and they contend that to reduce sexuality to this level is to minimize the ways that sexuality affects many different aspects of our lives. Sexuality influences our communication in many more contexts besides intimate/sexual relationships. Instead, sexuality often plays a significant role in the ways that we interact with other people in general. For example, consider the interaction between a self-identified gay man and a heterosexual man. The communication strategies of the gay man are likely to be unique if he finds the man desirable. If the heterosexual man knows that the other man is gay, this is likely to influence the ways that he communicates with him--particularly if he knows that the man finds him desirable. There are many different variables that could have a strong influence on the communication of these two men. I do not mean to suggest that because the gay man finds the heterosexual man attractive that he will make sexual advances. Nor am I suggesting that the straight man will necessarily reject the gay man. What I am suggesting is that desire and sexuality often plays a role (sometimes a significant role) in our communication with one another. Unfortunately, researchers have generally overlooked the role of sexuality and desire in human interaction.

In terms of academics, queer theorists are interested in addressing the desexualized nature of the academy. Sexuality, then, is brought to the fore in queer theorizing. Michael Warner (1993) explains that for "academics, being interested in queer theory is a
way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy, exude some rut, reimagine the
publics from which academic intellectuals write, dress, and perform" (p. xxvi). Queer
theorists argue that academics have been silent about sexuality for far too long, and that
sexuality is significant in terms of its affect on human life.

Furthermore, queer theorists (as well as activists) argue that our individual
sexualities are a fundamental and significant aspect of who we are as human beings—in
other words, our sexuality is much more than sexual behavior. For this reason, queer
theorists and activists insist upon being "out" about their sexual identities because this is a
significant variable in our individual identities. In other words, sexuality is--and, indeed, it
must be--invariably public. This is most obvious in the case of public displays of affection.
People do not think twice about a man and a woman holding hands as they walk down the
street. On the other hand, if it is two men or two women holding hands, heads turn.
More subtly, however, is that heterosexuals don't realize that whenever they talk about
their spouses, or even their children, they are talking about their sexuality.

Heterosexual weddings are public events (they are even announced in the
newspaper). Queer weddings, or commitment ceremonies, rarely receive public attention.
When television dramas and situation comedies have had gay and lesbian weddings as part
of their story lines, the programs have been widely censored (e.g., Roseanne, Northern
Exposure, and Friends). In addition, in the last several years, two programs, Roseanne
and Melrose Place, have had scenes that involved same-sex kisses. The Roseanne episode
involved a kiss between two women. This episode create a great deal of controversy, but
ultimately the program aired in most markets (although many sponsors withdrew their
advertising dollars). The *Melrose Place* episode aired, but the kiss was censored completely from the program. When heterosexuals argue that sexuality is a private matter, what they really seem to be saying is that queer sexualities—non-normative sexualities—should be kept quietly in the closet.

Heterosexuals are not solely responsible for the silence of sexuality. Liberation theory also tends to breed silence because it is based on the assumption that sexuality is not a significant variable in our behavior. Because assimilation (discussed below) relies in large part on the ability of gays and lesbians to "blend in," the significance of sexuality, ironically, is denied by liberation theory. Tierney (1993) compares assimilation with the notion of the "melting pot." He explains that "the idea that America is a 'melting pot' has long since been shown for what it is; those of us who are different are supposed to 'melt' into what is normal" (p. 9). In other words, because the goal of liberation theory is to foster assimilation by pointing out that gays and lesbians are really "no different" than heterosexuals, it would not be advantageous for liberationists to highlight points of departure. Although this is, almost certainly, not the intention of the liberation theorists, they have unwittingly reinforced the idea that sexuality is only a bedroom issue.

**Heteronormativity**

One of the most important challenges that queer theorists make about mainstream theory is the implicit equation in mainstream theory between heterosexuality and normality. Michael Warner (1993) refers to this important notion as "heteronormativity." **Heteronormativity** is the idea that heterosexuality is the only "normal" sexual identity. In other words, heterosexuality is seen as "natural," while other identities are often ignored
entirely.\textsuperscript{9} Warner's criticism, which is reflective of other queer theorist's views (Morrison, 1992; Smyth, 1992; Fuss, 1991; Butler, 1990), extends beyond "mainstream" positivist research and includes even "liberal" social and political theory. In other words, many supposedly "progressive" social theories refuse to interrogate sexual difference. In fact, Warner notes, "[f]or the most part, left traditions of social and political theory have been unwilling" (p. vii) to examine questions of (homo)sexuality head on. Instead, as Warner points out, these theories "have posited and naturalized a heterosexual society" (p. vii). Indeed, most theory is heteronormative in nature. Scott (1988) explains that most theories "view human sexual orientation as a dichotomy; people are either heterosexual and therefore normal, or they are homosexual" (p. 22).

The "normalization" of heterosexuality is not welcome news for those who do not fit into this tidy category. This is a significant consideration because if, as theorists, we make the assumption that heterosexuality is "normal" or "natural," we potentially miss a significant aspect of human life. When we assume that heterosexuality is the norm, we tend to disregard other alternatives as influences in our communication. In fact, the exclusion of all other possibilities--and I refer here to the literal absence, the invisibility, of other sexualities--further marginalizes individuals who do not experience the world from a heterosexual perspective. Also, to take this a step further, by assuming that heterosexuality is the only "natural," or "normal," possibility, we implicitly make the judgement that there is something wrong with being anything other than heterosexual. As theorists, we must be sensitive to the fact that when our theories ignore other alternatives, many voices are ultimately silenced, or at least distorted. (Obviously, this is true if we
disregard any site of difference--race, class, gender, sexual, etc.) I agree with Monique Wittig (1990) when she argues that heteronormativity is a form of violence. By silencing the voices of any group, we cut off their ability to communicate effectively. Wittig’s view is that as theorists we must consider the implications of heteronormativity:

The discourse which particularly oppress all of us, lesbians, women, and homosexual men, are those discourses which take for granted that what founds society, any society, is heterosexuality. These discourses speak about us and claim to say the truth in an apolitical field, and as if, in what concerns us, politically insignificant signs could exist. These discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms. Everything which puts them into question is at once disregarded as elementary. . . . These discourses deny us every possibility of creating our own categories. But their most ferocious action is the unrelenting tyranny that they exert upon our physical and mental selves. (p. 53)

There are many ways that heteronormative discourses are oppressive. In recent years, a number of issues have arisen in terms of the rights of individuals with non-normative sexualities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer). President Bill Clinton, for example, made "gays in the military" a household phrase during his 1992 bid for the White House. This is an excellent example of Wittig’s argument because it demonstrates both the physical and mental tyranny that queers face at the hands of the state. When we talk about a person’s livelihood, we are clearly talking about physical survival. Many people have been critical of the "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" policy, because it is viewed as government-condoned discrimination. On the other hand, the policy, which allows queers to serve in the military as long as they stay in the closet is a strong example of mental tyranny. To ask any person to hide his/her sexual identity carries the message that there is something wrong with being anything besides heterosexual. Queer theory emphasizes how
sexualities play a role—indeed, are a fundamental element—in the way that human beings interact in the world. Furthermore, as I have already noted, queer theorists seek to dismantle the tendency to privilege particular differences over other differences.

Marriage is another issue that has come to the fore recently. Aside from the physical benefits of marriage (tax benefits, health benefits, etc.), the popular (politically bipartisan) view that marriage is for heterosexuals only carries the message that queer relationships are unimportant. According Herek:

I think many heterosexuals get very nervous when they have to think of gay people in terms of relationships, because it challenges the way that they have always thought about gay people. I find it interesting that the same people who condemn homosexuality as being a promiscuous lifestyle also say they're against gay marriage because they wouldn't want to recognize stable gay relationships. (In Gallagher, July 23, 1996, p. 24)

These are just two examples of the ways that the heterosexual mainstream oppresses queers.

Heteronormativity extends beyond the simple exclusion of sexuality in theoretical discourse. Indeed, many scholars would argue that sexuality is a private matter, and that heterosexuality is not a significant part of most theory either. The problem with this thinking is that heterosexuality, in fact, is implicit in most theories. Put in more practical terms, when we read a study that deals with platonic relationships among friends of the opposite sex, the assumption would be made that the research subjects are heterosexual—unless, of course, the author states otherwise. Queer theorists argue that not only is sexuality a fundamental element of human life, but that alternative perspectives are
significant, valuable, and overlooked. To address this absence, then, queer theorists must make it clear that other alternatives exist. Warner (1993) suggests that theorists assert the necessarily and desirably queer nature of the world. This extra step has become necessary if only because so much privilege lies in heterosexual culture’s exclusive ability to interpret itself as a society. Het [sic] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis for all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist. (p. xxi)

Queer theorists are not interested in flipping the binaries that exist (e.g., male/female, masculine/feminine, straight/gay, or normative/queer), and thus reversing power relationships. Queer theory, in fact, rejects this notion because this creates a new structure in which a different side of the binary is privileged over others. Instead, queer theory is interested in advancing a model in which no group has power over another. To be sure, this is a utopian view. In other words, this is something that queer theorists and activists are always striving toward. The idea that queer theorists must take an "extra step" and "assert the necessarily and desirably queer nature of the world" is significant because doing so points to the individual differences among all people, whether they identify as queer or as a part of the mainstream. Put another way, queer theory points to the ways that all human beings are queer, or different, to some extent. In other words, queer theorists contend that all human beings are unique; no one fits neatly into any identity category. Unlike liberation theorists and heteronormative theorists, queer theorists draw attention to these differences, rather than trying to sweep these differences under the carpet. Instead, these theorists point out, interrogate, and celebrate the differences among all people.
Rejection of Essentialism

Queer theorists argue that the idea of a static, essential, or natural identity is a myth. Queer theorists argue that identities are fluid and they change over time. Further, queer theorists view queer identities as inevitably plural, rather than singular. To put it another way, queer theorists and activists argue that there is no such thing as a gay identity, or a lesbian identity, or even a mainstream identity. Instead, queers believe that there are as many identities as there are individuals.

Queer theory rejects any perspective that approaches theory from a universal perspective. Instead of arguing that queers, as a group, behave in a particular way, queer theory points to the ways in which identities are constructed, communicated, and performed by individuals. This is, I believe, one of the most significant challenges raised by queer theory. I find myself agreeing with Seidman (1993) when he argues that:

Contemporary lesbian and gay male culture\textsuperscript{11} evidenced a heightened sensitivity to issues of difference and the social formation of desire, sexuality, and identity. As individuals we know what it means to be treated as different, to be rendered as a deviant other by folk and expert cultures, and to approach our bodies, desires, and identities with a deliberateness often lacking in mainstream straight society. Nevertheless, our existential awareness of the cultural politics of otherness has not necessarily been represented in our dominant theories. (p. 105)

In other words, as Seidman points out, gay/lesbian liberation culture has begun to show signs of embracing difference, at least to a degree. Nevertheless, while there seems to be a shift away from liberation thinking, this shift has been undertheorized.

The queer movement is unique in that it avoids essentialism on two separate levels. First, while liberationists have argued for years that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are essentially no different from heterosexuals, the new theorists argue that queers are
different but that marginalization is not justified on the basis of these differences. Second, queer theorists and activists avoid essentialism among queer collectives as well as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter three.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of queer identity is the refusal to name what that identity means. In other words, a queer identity celebrates the difference and diversity of the individuals who are oppressed by the heterosexist mainstream (that is, a mainstream that discriminates against anyone other than those that are perceived to be "normal") without fixing or essentializing that identity. This heterosexism stems, primarily, from the assumption that the purpose of sexual activity is procreation. Even though, obviously, not all heterosexual sex is procreative, it has the possibility of being so. Sex with the potential for procreation, therefore, is considered "natural." This sentiment is echoed in the quip: "If God had intended two men to be together, He would have created Adam and Steve, not Adam and Eve."

A frequent issue that is raised in gay and lesbian studies, as well as in queer studies, is the debate over biological determinism and social constructionism. This argument is closely tied to the issue of essentialism in theory. Queer theorists tend to reject the notion of biological determinism, at least to a certain degree. In other words, while most queer theorists (but not all) would agree that we are born with a particular orientation, the ways in which we each "perform" these identities are not biologically determined. Many queer theorists also reject, as Bornstein (1995) suggests, the idea that sexual orientation should be viewed in terms of gender. Queer theorists firmly reject
notions such as "gay sensibility." One risk of the determinist view is that essentialism is inevitable—if we are born with a particular orientation, we will behave in certain ways.

On the other hand, while many scholars have found social constructionism to be a useful idea in terms of theorizing sexual difference, queer theory would deny that identity construction is simply a matter of symbolic determination. This does not deny that the symbols that we confront on a daily basis shape our lives in significant ways. Most queer theorists would argue that sexual identity is much more complicated than anyone has considered previously (in particular mainstream theory and liberation theory). Much like the essentialist view, social constructionism also results in rigid identity categories (although, granted, less so than for the biological argument). Furthermore, if, as theorists, we adhere to the social constructionist explanation, we must then accept that our identities are purely a matter of learned behavior, values, attitudes, etc. Unfortunately, to argue that identities are either socially constructed or biologically determined forces a dichotomy. The process is, obviously, not so simple. To summarize, queer theory must begin to delve further into the relationship between social constructionism and essentialism. I find myself agreeing with Corey (1996) who is careful not to argue that same-sex desire is a social construct. Rather, Corey's contention is that sexual identity is much more than desire, and that these identities are "performed" in social contexts.

I do not mean to suggest that taking a queer perspective necessitates disassociating oneself with gay/lesbian culture. Indeed, as I have pointed out, these "cultures" seem to be showing signs of embracing difference. The important thing, from the perspective of queer theory, is that we recognize that such cultures are much more diverse than we may
have originally thought. Indeed, as Irvine (1996) explains, such cultural ties are important:

These deconstructions, however, do not suggest that cultures are so amorphous and so diffuse that they defy social analysis. Nor do they imply that identities are so fluid as to be easily tried on and shrugged off, thus becoming culturally and individually meaningless. Rather, they insist on a recognition of the paradoxes of culture and identity: we need cultural identities for social location, even while we must maintain continual awareness of their constructed nature; social movements simultaneously challenge and reinforce the importance and meanings of identities.

(p. 229)

Rejection of Assimilation

A final notion that is central to queer theory and activism is the notion of assimilation. In other words, mainstream theory and "traditional" gay and lesbian liberation theory, point to the ways that gay men, lesbians, and, supposedly, bisexuals can fit in neatly among the mainstream. Put another way, these theories strive to make sexual identity something that ultimately should not be a major factor in determining who is allowed to participate in society. Many liberation groups argue that it is unjust to treat people differently based on their sexual orientations. Seidman (1993) points out that the primary goal of the early homophile movement was, indeed, social assimilation:

Although many in the mainstream homophile movement described homosexuals as a minority, this difference was not celebrated. They did not promote the building of an autonomous homosexual culture. Instead they interpreted the minority condition of homosexuals as an unfortunate consequence of social discrimination.
They sought to abolish the homosexual as a distinct social identity. They intended social assimilation. (p. 111)

The notion of culture is critical to understanding liberation politics. Indeed, liberationists are not interested in developing or maintaining a unique culture; these theorists and activists are interested in deemphasizing sexual orientation to ensure full participation in society. Tierney (1993) is critical of such an approach:

> Assimilation, acculturation, and other code words really imply that those who "have culture" need to lose it. Gay people should be "straight." People of color should adopt "white" definitions of family, community, desire, and so on. Women should assume masculine identities. (p. 9)

Seidman (1993) argues that from roughly 1969-1973, the early liberation movements directly challenged the thinking of the homophile movement. In particular, they "contested the notion of homosexuality as a condition of a segment of humanity; repudiated the idea of homosexuality as symptomatic of psychic or social inferiority; and rejected a politics of assimilation" (p. 111). In the early years of the liberation movement, the goals of both activists and theorists were directed toward rejecting dualistic thinking in terms of sexuality. In other words, the early liberationists sought to "institute a sexual regime in which sexuality is not defined by mutually exclusive gender preference" (Seidman, 1993, p. 113).

The thinking of the early liberationists was somehow lost over the years, however. In particular, Seidman (1993) documents a shift in thinking between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s. At this time groups began to form that were relatively gender specific. Seidman explains that a "gay subculture was created largely by and for men. Moreover, many lesbians either identified with the women's movement or with the lesbian separatist
project of forging a woman-sculture [sic]" (p. 116). The gay male project was oriented
toward what might be called a rights discourse. In other words, "the dominant agenda of
the male-dominated gay culture became community building and winning civil rights"
(Seidman, 1993, p. 117). While the emphasis on community building had a parallel in the
lesbian feminist culture, lesbian feminists did not share the interest in gay (male) rights.
Seidman explains that "whereas gay men represented themselves as an ethnic group
oriented toward assimilation, lesbian feminists presented themselves as the vanguard of a
gender-separatist politic" (p. 117).

Queer activists and theorists reject the assimilationist thinking found in the
liberation theories. In other words, queers are not interested in fitting neatly in and among
the mainstream. Instead, as Smyth (1992) notes, "activists are not interested in seeking
acceptance within an unchanged social system, but are seeking out to 'fuck up the
mainstream' as visibly as possible" (p. 20). Furthermore, Cunningham (1992) notes that
queer activists and theorists "aren't trying to say to the straight world, 'Accept us, because
we're just like you.' That was the old tactic, which is now disparagingly known as
assimilation. Queer Nation's official tag line is 'We're here. We're queer. Get used to it'"
(p. 63). The point here is that queer theorists adamantly reject assimilationist politics. In
fact, these theories in many ways seek to dismantle sexual orientation categories, and they
seek to explode individual sexual difference as a site of power. Finally, Smyth concludes
that queer theory and activism promises "a refusal to apologise or assimilate into
invisibility. It provides a way of asserting desires that shatter gender identities and
sexualities, in the manner of some early Gay Power and lesbian feminist activists once envisaged" (p. 60).

These theorists oppose oppression, but they do so by reinscribing sexual categories (i.e. homosexual, heterosexual, gay, lesbian, straight, etc.), and then they contend, ironically, that these sites of difference are not really very important. Queer theorists, on the other hand, argue that sexual difference is important, that queers are different, and that difference does not justify oppression and violence (physical or symbolic) toward queers.

Arguably, not all gay and lesbian activism has relied upon assimilation into the mainstream as a goal. Lesbian separatists, for example, have argued in favor of the creation of women's communities. Nonetheless, these movements have been widely criticized for their lack of inclusivity. Both the lesbian feminist movement and the lesbian separatist movement have been criticized for essentializing what it means to be a lesbian. In particular, women of color have criticized the movements for excluding them (Kennedy & Davis, 1994). As Diana Fuss (1989) notes, "lesbian theory is less willing to question or part with the idea of a 'lesbian essence' and an identity politics based on this shared essence" (p. 98).

**Tensions Between Theory and Practice**

A common argument is over the word *queer* itself. Many gay men and lesbians find the term offensive, others are reminded of the way the word had been hurled at them in the past. Those who use the term argue that it is empowering to "take back" the insult. Michael Cunningham (1992) explains:
The name itself started as a joke of sorts. "Queer Nation" was a temporary moniker, offered in jest. Once the founding members got used to it, though, they didn't mind the idea of throwing a word like "queer" back in the faces of those who'd been spitting it at them for decades. They decided they could repossess the insult; they could cauterize it by taking it on themselves. (p. 63)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (in an interview with Chinn, Digangi & Horrigan, 1992) notes:

I think what's really interesting about the word "queer," as about most words about sexual identities, is that it isn't up to one person to define. Any word like that represents a very contested site, and "queer" does so in some especially interesting ways, partly because it started out as a pejorative term and has been consciously reclaimed as an honorific term; partly because it's an experiment--not the first experiment--with finding a non-gender-specific name for a variety of sexual experiences and practices. (p. 80)

Finally, Roz Kaveny, an activist in Great Britain, rejects the notion that gay is inherently a positive term:

Back in the 60s when I was trying to figure out whether I was "gay" or transsexual or what, the people I got to know in the TS/drag queen network in the north would use "queer" in a "what of it?" way. They'd sometimes use it in a self-deprecating manner and the two uses would shade into each other. "Gay" was useful, but it changed nothing. The average homophobe uses it as derogatively as "poofler" or "homo." It's just another word, it doesn't have intrinsic power for good. (In Smyth, 1992, p. 22)

Another criticism of queer theory and activism is that it is dominated, ironically, by white gay men. Sheila Jeffries (1994) argues that queer theory runs the risk of erasing lesbians from the struggle for acceptance. Jeffries argues that the "appearance of queer theory and queer studies threatens to mean the disappearance of lesbians. The developing field of lesbian and gay studies is dominated by the queer impulse. Lesbian feminism is conspicuous by its absence" (p. 459). On one level, I agree with Jeffries' argument. On the other hand, because queer theory strives to destabilize lesbian and gay identity categories, not only does lesbian feminism lose its influence, but so does gay male
liberation theory. In fact, as I argued in the previous chapter, queer theory is a reaction to
liberation thinking.

Furthermore, Jeffries (1994) argues that in "queer theory and queer studies, lesbians seem to appear only where they can assimilate seamlessly into gay male culture and politics. No difference is generally recognized in interests, culture, and history between lesbians and gay men" (p. 459). Again, I find myself strongly disagreeing with Jeffries. The point that Jeffries seems to be missing is that queer theory "troubles" gender--both male and female. Yes, the lesbian disappears as a category, but so does the gay male. Theoretically, queer theory and activism are "genderless," at least in terms of our traditional understanding of male and female. At the same time, though, I suppose that the key question is whether or not "genderless" translates into masculinist. I don't believe that it must. I believe, instead, that because queer theory works to upset both gender and sexual categories, it is making strides toward eliminating both hetero-sexism and sexism that a liberatory politics cannot. On the other hand, Jeffries also fails to acknowledge that many groups, including women that have felt marginalized in the lesbian feminist movement, have found a home in the queer movement.

To summarize, queer theory opens up possibilities in theory by mounting a radical critique of identity. As Diana Fuss (1989) argues:

Such a view of identity as unstable and potentially disruptive, as alien and incoherent, could in the end produce a more mature identity politics by militating against the tendency to erase differences and inconsistencies in the production of stable political subjects. (p. 104)
Rather than resisting feminist criticism of patriarchy, queer theory takes this criticism one step further—albeit a radical step. Queer theory "troubles" gender and sexual categories which forces us to examine the political implications of these restrictive categories. I agree with Judith Butler (1990) when she points out that:

The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity politics has been articulated. The internal paradox of this foundationalism is that it presumes, fixes, and constrains the very "subjects" that it hopes to represent and liberate. (p. 148)

In the following chapter, I will provide an extensive discussion of social movement theory and the emergence of the queer movements. As I have suggested, there are important links between queer theory and queer activism. Furthermore, the assumptions of queer theory provide a unique framework for understanding the confrontational rhetoric of social movements based on identity.
Notes

1. Throughout Bornstein's discussion of these models she uses the term gender, when, in fact, she is referring to sex or biological gender.

2. In this case, Butler is referring to the socially constructed notion of gender as opposed to biological sex.

3. Bornstein is referring here to biological sex.

4. Bornstein refers here to what she terms "biological gender." In terms of my definitions, this is the same thing as (biological) sex.

5. The literature on camp is growing. Probably the most influential work on camp has been Susan Sontag's (1966) essay, "Notes on Camp." Sontag's essay, however, dismisses camp as being nothing more than a style, or an aesthetic act. More recent work dismisses Sontag's work by arguing that camp breaks down traditional gender categories that oppress queers (Babuscio, 1993; Bergman, 1993a; Bergman, 1993b; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1992; Long, 1993; Meyer, 1994; Ross, 1993). Moe Meyer (1994) emphasizes that camp "is both political and critical" (p. 1). Furthermore, Andrew Ross (1993) argues that the "politics of camp assume that there is no easy escape from these definitions [gender, sex, and sexual identity], and in this respect, it is opposed to the search for alternative, utopian, or essentialist identities that lay behind many of the countercultural and sexual liberation movements" (p. 72).

6. In her book, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety, Marjorie Garber (1992) eloquently notes:

   For me, therefore, one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of "male" and "female," whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural. The current popularity of cross-dressing as a theme in art and criticism represents, I think, an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking, whether particularized as male and female, black and white, yes and no, Republican and Democrat, self and other, or in any other way. (pp. 10-11)

7. This is a case where Butler's language can cause some confusion. On the one hand, Butler appears to reject individual identity labels when she refers to "the singular notion of identity" as a "mismomer." Butler, however, is referring to essential identity categories (i.e. gay, straight, lesbian, etc.). Indeed, Butler further questions essential gender categories in the same paragraph.
8. One could also infer from this that America has less of a problem with two women kissing than they do with two men as was the case on Melrose Place. The running joke in the gay community is that Matt, the openly gay character on Melrose Place, is the only character that is not sleeping with multiple partners during a season. In fact, Matt never sleeps with anyone. This is ironic considering that the dominant belief is that gay men are sexually promiscuous.

9. In fact, when sexual identities are addressed in theory one of two assumptions are generally made either implicitly or explicitly. One common approach is to address "homosexuality" as a disease or illness. Another common approach is to address it as a form of moral bankruptcy.

10. Marriage is an issue that is controversial among queers. While most queers would agree that it is unconscionable to deny civil rights and benefits because of sexual orientation, many queers are opposed to marriage because they view it as assimilationist.

11. Although he does not use the terminology, Seidman is referring to queer theory and activism here.
CHAPTER 3

QUEER PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Queer theory, as I have noted, must be understood primarily as the product of queer activism. Indeed, the queer movements stand alone from other movements in many ways. In particular, these movements provide a perspective on understanding social change and confrontation that has not been accounted for in contemporary social movement theories. Any social movement relies upon the ability of a group to mobilize against a dominant force. Most movements—particularly identity movements—rely upon the ability to construct essential identity categories in order to come together as a group. This is where the queer movements are unique. Furthermore, in terms of rhetorical social movement theories, the queer perspective raises issues that have not been addressed in the literature. In order to understand the unique contributions of the queer perspectives to our understanding of social movement activity, it is necessary to understand existing theories of social movements from both communication and sociology. What I provide here is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature. Indeed, there have been a number of excellent articles that provide a comprehensive review of social movement
studies. Instead, this discussion is intended to provide an understanding of the theoretical approaches of communication scholars on the persuasive nature of social movements.

**Communication Approaches to Social Movement Persuasion**

While there are a number of disagreements among scholars who take the different approaches discussed below, there are a number of issues that they agree upon. For the most part, scholars seem to agree upon a number of characteristics of social movements. First, in general scholars agree that social movements are collectives with at least minimal organization (Simons, 1970; Simons, Mechling, & Schreir, 1984; Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1989; Wilson, 1973). Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) argue that if "we cannot identify leaders (or spokespersons), membership (or followers or believers), and one or more organizations, the phenomenon we are studying is a trend, fad, or social unrest, not a social movement" (p.5).

Second, social movements are not institutionalized groups (Simons, 1970, Simons, Mechling, & Schreir, 1984; Smelser, 1962; Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1989). In other words, social movements are not part of the established order that governs, sets policies, and dictates norms. Simons, Mechling, and Schreir (1984) explain that the distinction between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized groups is significant, because it draws "attention to the disadvantaged position of both movement organizations and their ideas vis-a-vis the larger society" (p. 794) which is significant for rhetorical scholars because we have few theories "about how influence is exerted from the bottom up" (p. 794).

Third, the rhetoric of social movements is moral in tone (Stewart, Smith, and Denton, 1989). Specifically, because social movements are protesting against a dominant
institution that they see as imposing improper societal norms they are, by definition, moral in tone. Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) argue that every "movement believes that it alone constitutes an ethical, virtuous, principled, and righteous force with a ‘moral obligation’ to raise the consciousness of ‘the people.’" (p. 11). Furthermore, as Oberschall (1973) explains, in order for a movement to be successful, it must effectively elaborate "systems of belief and moral ideas" (p. 235).

Fourth, and finally, social movements are countered by an established order that seeks to squelch the activities and discourse of the movement. Because social movements attempt to change societal norms and values, they threaten the established order by challenging their moral authority. The dominant order tends to respond to social movements by "portraying themselves as goaded into action by a dangerous, fanatical, irresponsible, unreasonable threat to legitimate order" (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1989, p. 12). Social movements challenge the mainstream by creating a "drama or agonistic ritual which forces response from the establishment commensurate with the moral evil perceived by movement leaders" (Cathcart, 1978, p. 242). This is significant because social movements do not have the resources that are typically available to those with power in society.

**Historical Approach**

The first, and still influential method of studying the persuasive nature of social movements has been to take an historical approach. This approach relies on developing a concrete understanding of the social forces that give rise to protest and activism, the social context in which the confrontational discourse occurs. A scholar using the historical
approach relies on the ability to take an objective stance in relation to the movement; in other words, historical methods require that the scholar not make judgements about either the participants in the movement or the dominant social institutions that are being opposed. Andrews (1983) points out that "[m]odern historians seek to avoid the imposition of some theoretical, political, or philosophical a priori interpretation of events" (p. 67). Furthermore, Zarefsky (1980) explains that one of the problems with many rhetorical studies of social movements is that theorists have attempted to impose particular rhetorical standards without considering the historical context. Specifically, he explains that "we have created constructs and rhetorical categories prematurely on an a priori basis rather than as the outgrowth of historical research" (p. 253). Scholars who take the historical approach to social movements, then, are interested in the rhetorical strategies that emerge as the result of particular historical circumstances.² To put this another way, some scholars have referred to the "evolution" of rhetorical strategies based on historical exigencies. Ultimately, the goal of a scholar studying a movement should be to uncover "how that evolution [of discourse] influenced the nature, direction, intensity, and the outcome of the movement" (Lucas, 1980, p. 263).

Scholars studying the rhetorical aspects of movements from an historical perspective, then, must have a thorough understanding of the circumstances and context of the period in which a movement in active. Only by taking such an approach, Andrews (1983) contends, can we begin to understand what he believes to be the most significant rhetorical issues pertaining to social movements. Andrews contends that:
The real questions are: What historical circumstances stimulate rhetorical behavior? And what rhetorical behaviors are chosen within the range of behavioral possibilities? Simply by identifying certain kinds of rhetorical behavior we have not come to the heart of the matter anymore than we have produced an insight on a speaker’s style by saying he used metaphor frequently. The patterns, meanings, and significance of behaviors within a specific context are what the rhetorical scholar studying historical movements seeks to identify and explain. (p. 68)

One of the major criticisms of historical approaches is that they are primarily descriptive rather than theoretical. In other words, these studies describe the development of movements, but they tend not to make unique contributions to our understanding of rhetorical processes. In other words, critics of the historical approach contend that these studies are essentially descriptive case studies of particular social movements. Stewart (1983) argues that historical movements reveal little beyond their singular concerns and tend to focus on spectacular and often atypical events, strategies, individuals, and movements. Thus, we know more about the use of obscenities by the Yippies than we do about how the labor movement sustained itself for a century, and we know more about how social movements confront established orders than how they attract and maintain commitment of members. Although case studies contribute valuable knowledge about the rhetoric of specific social movements, they cannot provide the generalizations necessary for a thorough understanding of that rhetoric. (p. 77)

Rhetorical-historical scholars, though, contend that history is, in itself, instructive even if such a study does not produce new or better understandings of theory. As Plumb (1971) explains, "[h]istory can teach all who are literate about the nature of social change" (p. 143). While Andrews (1983), one of the major proponents of historical studies, denies that such an approach is "anti-theoretical" (p. 69), he also warns that rather than imposing a priori theoretical frameworks on movements, "it might be best if historical scholars don’t theorize at all" (p. 69).
**Systems Approach**

The most influential approach to the persuasive nature of social movements has been the systems approach, stemming from Bertalanffy's (1968) General Systems Theory. The social systems approach focuses on the movement as a subsystem of a larger social system. Most of the literature has taken a "micro" approach by examining the genesis, life, and decline of movements. In other words, scholars have been primarily interested in the ways that communication plays a role in the beginning of a movement, how movements develop persuasive campaigns and communication among members of the movement, and the demise of the movements (which could be as the result of either success or failure).

These theorists, in general, emphasize the notion that social movement rhetoric is the result of periods of societal breakdown as the result of values and morals being called into question (Cathcart, 1978). Indeed, as Cathcart (1978) explains, it "is this confrontational aspect--the questioning of the values and societal norms--that makes true movements a real threat that cannot be explained away as a temporary malfunction of the system" (p. 238).

Other studies taking a social systems approach have focused on the effects of the movement on the larger social system (macroscopic studies). These studies, in particular, have not cast movement participants in a very positive light. Indeed, as Simons, Mechling, and Schreier (1984) explain:

> By the end of the twentieth century most theorists tended to identify with the maintenance of existing social systems more than with the interests of those who sought collectively to effect basic changes in those systems. From such a systems-oriented perspective, movements seemed unnecessary, irrational, dysfunctional, and potentially dangerous. (p. 800)
Many rhetorical scholars, particularly during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, took a traditional classical approach to persuasion. Arguing from this perspective, scholars were critical of discourse that was confrontational or deviated from societal norms. Indeed, in their defense of confrontational discourse, Scott and Smith (1969) argue that "since the time of Aristotle, academic rhetorics have been for the most part instruments of established society, presupposing the ‘goods’ of order, civility, reason, decorum, and civil or theocratic law" (p. 8). Finally, Simons, Mechling, and Schreier (1984) explain that "rhetoricians until recently displayed an anticonflict, proestablishment bias—manifested, for example, in the assumption that friendly, coactive forms of persuasion, useful in academic discussions, were equally appropriate in conflicts with repressive, recalcitrant elites" (p. 801).

**Functional Approach**

The functional approach to social movements is a macroscopic view of how movements work. Rather than focusing on particular discourse (a microscopic approach), functionalists have focused on the premise that "rhetoric is the primary agency through which social movements must perform vital functions which enable them to come into existence, to remain viable collectives, to meet opposition, and to bring about or to resist change" (Stewart, 1983, p. 8). Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) emphasize that this approach treats "persuasive efforts with broad brushstrokes, and is thus more capable than traditional microscopic approaches of contributing to our understanding of the immense persuasive canvasses produced by a bewildering array of social movements" (p. 119).

Furthermore, functionalists acknowledge that historical approaches to social movements
play an important role in understanding how movements function (Andrews, 1980; Smith, 1980).

The scholars who take a functionalist approach to social movement activity have emphasized different functions that have seemed particularly important to the movements that they have examined. Simons (1970), for example, provides a leadership-centered approach to social movement rhetoric. In particular, Simons (1970) argues that social movements "must fulfill the same functional requirements as more formal collectives. These imperatives constitute rhetorical requirements for the leadership of a movement" (p. 2). At times, the requirements of the movement come into conflict with one another (for example, the goals of the movement might come into conflict with the maintenance of the collective). When this happens, these conflicts "create rhetorical problems which in turn affect decisions on rhetorical strategy" (Simons, 1970, p. 2). These problems are a test of the rhetorical skills of a movement leader and "his capacity to fulfill the requirements of his movement by resolving or reducing rhetorical problems" (Simons, 1970, p. 3).

Simons, Mechling, and Schreier (1984) conclude that the rhetorical requirements of leaders can be categorized under three broad headings:

1. They must attract, maintain, and mold workers (i.e., followers) into an efficiently organized unit.
2. They must secure adoption of their product by the larger structure (i.e., the external system, the established order).
3. They must react to resistance generated by the larger structure. (p. 807)

From this perspective, nearly all of the analysis is on the rhetorical strategies employed by movement leaders, and there is little attention given to participants within the movements themselves.
Other scholars have argued that a more general functionalist approach is appropriate for the study of movements. Gronbeck (1973) sets up a framework for understanding how particular movements function in general, and he specifically applies his framework to the Black Action Movement at the University of Michigan of 1970. Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) develop a framework that considers both general and specific functions of movements that rhetorical scholars might consider in their consideration of movements. They suggest that scholars might consider how movements function to: (1) transform perceptions of history, (2) alter perceptions of society, (3) prescribe courses of action, (4) mobilize for action, and (5) sustain the movement itself (p. 121). Stewart (1983) acknowledges that for a social movement study to engage all of these issues "would be realistic only for a thesis, book, or series of articles" (p. 79), and he suggests that the "analyst must determine which functions, which social movements, which messages, and how many messages to include in each study" (p. 79).

Queer critique of communication approaches

The existing rhetorical frameworks for understanding social movements have played a significant role in our understanding of the persuasive nature of movements. Each of them has, in unique ways, contributed to our knowledge about how members of a social movement collective communicate their wishes. Nevertheless, these theories each present problems in terms of some of the movements that have emerged in recent years.

The historical approach to movement rhetoric is the least disconcerting, and yet it still has shortcomings in terms of queer theory. To be sure, understanding the history of why a movement has developed, and the particular context in which discourse takes place
is important to understanding social change. Nevertheless, while there is some value in
the type of "descriptive" work that historical criticism produces as opposed to
"theoretical" writing, such an approach does little in terms of accounting for how
movement participants identities are constructed and shaped through movement
participation. An historical study of movements might remind us that what occurs in one
place, may not be the same phenomenon that would occur in another. To put this another
way, such historical case studies might result in theories that are not widely generalizeable.
In short, while I appreciate the descriptive approach, I find myself wanting more in terms
of theoretical explanations--even if this means that scholars may not just be able to press
any particular movement into such a framework. Identity movements in general, and the
queer movements in particular, are likely to be difficult movements to analyze from such a
perspective since identity constructions are not only historically constructed, but by other
variables as well (e.g., biologically or genetically).

The systems approaches to social movement studies are problematic from the
perspective of queer theory for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly, there are benefits to
developing an understanding of the effects of social movement activity on society in
general. Furthermore, some of these studies are useful in helping us to understand how
movements must operate as collectives in order to sustain the movement and to have any
hope of effecting change. Nevertheless, the negative tone that these studies take toward
movements and movement participants is disconcerting. Of course, from a systems
perspective, this is not surprising. Systems theory is based on the assumption that systems
should strive for balance, or homeostasis, and that if conflict is not kept in check the
system will entropy (die). In other words, these studies view social movement activity as a potential threat to society as a whole. From the perspective of queer theory, it is naive to assume that polite discourse is the only ethical way for human beings to achieve their goals. Indeed, if this were the case, marginalized groups would always remain silent. In other words, because the disempowered often do not have the power or resources to participate in traditional discourse, at times the only way that they can be heard is to kick and scream. Rhetorical scholars need to understand that such rhetoric is not "bad" or "inappropriate" discourse. Furthermore, as supposed experts in human relations and symbolic constructions of reality, we must understand that some times those human relations are rhetorically constructed in such a way that they empower certain individuals and groups, and that they disempower others.

Like the historical and systems approaches, the functional approaches provide us with important information about how collectives function both to maintain the movement itself, as well as to construct messages for the dominant society. Queer theorists would appreciate the fact that functional approaches, in general, have moved away from the negative characterizations of movements and confrontational rhetoric. First, though, as I have already discussed, Simons's (1970) leader-centered approach is a concern from the perspective of queer theory because it de-emphasizes the rhetoric of other individuals in the movement. Furthermore, as I will discuss at length below, such an approach is inappropriate for any movement (like the queer movement) that has a decentralized leadership structure. Second, the more general functional approaches of scholars such as Gronbeck (1973), Stewart (1980, 1983), and Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) are
problematic because they focus exclusively on collective action, and pay little attention to the individual contributions of movement participants.

The focus on collective action is characteristic of all three of the communication approaches, and given that the objects of study are movements, we should not be surprised that the focus tends to be on groups and not on individuals. Nevertheless, these approaches tend to overlook the fact that movements are comprised of unique individuals who make unique contributions to the life and discourse of the collective action of movements.

Sociological Approaches: The Emergence of "New" Social Movements

What scholars interested in the rhetoric of social movements have overlooked, and what queer theory provides, is an understanding of how individual identities are constructed both within and outside of movement cultures. While sociologists have discussed the role of collective identities in terms of how movements mobilize, communication scholars have been notably silent on this point. To the extent that identities are a social construction—that is, they are constructed through rhetorical means—this is a major oversight.

Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield (1994) point out that in "the last two decades, the emergence of new forms of collective action in advanced industrial societies stimulated a provocative and innovative reconceptualization of the meaning of social movements" (p. 3). Theorists found it difficult, given the existing approaches to social movements, to explain these new movements. In fact, Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield explain.
In both Europe and North America, movements have arisen that stretch the explanatory capacities of older theoretical perspectives. Peace movements, student movements, the anti-nuclear energy protests, minority nationalism, gay rights, women's rights, animal rights, alternative medicine, fundamentalist religious movements, and New Age and ecology movements are but a sampling of the phenomena that have engaged the puzzled attention of sociologists, historians, and political scientists. (p. 3)

For the most part, these movements can be understood as identity movements.

Significantly, though, these developments in protest and mobilization "were difficult to conceptualize with either the imagery of the ideological movements of the past or the rationally organized interest group" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 6).

**Characteristics of new social movements**

Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield (1994) point out that there are a number of common traits that are shared by the new social movements (NSMs). They are careful to note that not all of the new movements display all of these characteristics. Likewise, not all emerging movements can be designated as "new." First, Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield (1994) explain that the NSMs are typically not organized around class structures, as was common in many earlier movements. It is not possible, therefore, to explain the NSMs with the earlier theories that tended to emphasize this structural component.

Instead, these movements tend to "find their most frequent structural roots in rather diffuse social statuses such as youth, gender, sexual orientation, or professions that do not correspond with structural explanations" (p. 6).

Second, "the ideological characteristics of NSMs stand in sharp contrast to the working-class movement and to the Marxist conception of ideology as a unifying and totalizing element for collective action" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, pp. 6-7).
While earlier movements tended to emphasize overarching ideologies (liberal or conservative, right or left, capitalist or socialist) the NSMs are not so easily understood in ideological terms. Instead, these movements tend to "exhibit a pluralism of ideas and values, and they tend to have pragmatic orientations and search for institutional reforms that enlarge the systems of members' participation in decision making" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 7).

Fourth, Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield (1994) explain that "NSMs often involve the emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identity" (p. 7). While earlier movements tended to emphasize the economic grievances of the working-class, the new movements tend to focus on "cultural and symbolic issues that are linked with identity" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 7). Several new social movement theorists argue that both individual and collective identities are crucial to understanding the new movements (McAdam, 1994; Melucci, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1992; Taylor & Whittier, 1995; Gamson, 1992; Friedman & McAdam, 1992).

Fifth, the NSMs tend to focus on personal and intimate aspects of daily human life (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 8). This, of course, makes sense since the movements are directly related to the identities of the participants. Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield explain that these movements tend to "extend into arenas of daily life: what we eat, wear, and enjoy; how we make love, cope with personal problems, or plan or shun careers" (p. 8). A sixth characteristic of the NSMs is that they tend to rely on radical mobilization techniques such as disruption and resistance (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 8).
Seventh, the emergence of new social movement groups is "related to the credibility crisis of the conventional channels for participation in Western democracies" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 8). Participants in NSMs tend to feel disenfranchised from the mainstream, and thus they seek alternative routes of participation. Finally, the NSMs tend to be "segmented, diffuse, and decentralized" (Johnston, Laraña, & Gusfield, 1994, p. 8). While this varies considerably depending on the movement, local groups tend to have considerable autonomy in decision making. In other words, the role of regional and national organizations tends to be limited.

The cultural dimensions of social movements

In recent years, sociologists have become increasingly interested in the cultural aspects of social movements. Taylor and Whittier (1995) argue, however, to varying degrees all social movements are culture producing. For many years, social movement theory ignored the cultural aspects of movements largely because the theories were dominated with a structuralist bias (McAdam, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1995). In particular, as McAdam (1994) points out, the resource mobilization and political process perspectives have "privileged the political, organizational, and network/structural aspects of social movements while giving the more cultural and ideational dimensions of collective action short shrift" (p. 36). Along similar lines, Taylor and Whittier (1995) argue:

Recent interest among social movement scholars in the relationship between culture and social movements is part of a larger trend in which sociologists from a variety of specialties [including communication scholars], criticizing the structuralist bias of American sociology that privileges mechanistic explanations over subjectivist and cultural interpretations, are calling for the reintegration of symbolic factors in social analysis. (p. 163)
McAdam (1994) suggests that this shift could be in part because, for a relatively young generation of scholars, the earlier notion that social movement activity was irrational was not appealing on the basis that it did not fit the lived experience of many activists/scholars. Whatever the reason, scholars are beginning to recognize the significant role of culture on social movement mobilization. Taylor and Whittier (1995) explain that "[m]ost analysts agree that the mobilization of protest is facilitated by a group's ability to develop and maintain a set of beliefs and loyalties that contradict those of dominant groups" (p. 163).

Taylor and Whittier (1995) suggest four conceptual frameworks that are useful in understanding the cultural dimensions of social movements: (1) emergent norms and collective action frames, (2) collective identity, (3) ritual, and (4) discourse. In this section, I will discuss the theoretical foundation of each of these frameworks, and the implications of these frameworks in terms of understanding contemporary queer activism. It is important to recognize that Taylor and Whittier point out that the cultural dimensions "overlap considerably" (p. 164), and that "they are not so much separate and independent elements of social movement culture as they are alternative ways to approach the analysis of culture that reflect different theoretical positions and epistemological stances" (pp. 164-165).

**Emergent norms and interpretive frames.** The first framework that Taylor and Whittier (1995) discuss, emergent norms and interpretive frameworks, has its roots in the symbolic interactionist tradition. It is first suggested in the classical emergent norm approach of Turner and Killian (1987), and it is further developed in the work of Snow and Benford (1992). Taylor and Whittier (1995) explain that the "emergent norm
approach highlights the way that challenging groups redefine normative frameworks to justify and promote mobilization for change" (p. 167). The concept of frame alignment (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986) was introduced to "explain how movements bring potential recruits' individual viewpoints into congruence with the movement's emergent and collective perspectives" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 167). This approach emphasizes the role of cultural factors in recruitment and mobilization. Furthermore, Taylor and Whittier (1995) suggest that it is particularly useful because it "offers an explanation of the role of meaning in collective action that can be integrated with the structural concerns of resource mobilization theory" (p. 168).

The concept of frame has been widely used in many disciplines. Snow and Benford (1992) suggest that the term "refers to an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses 'the world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, events, experiences, and sequences of actions with one's present or past environment" (p. 137). Furthermore, Snow and Benford identify three functions of collective action action frames: punctuation, attribution, and articulation. First, the punctuation function refers to the fact that "collective action frames serve as accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable" (Snow and Benford, 1992, p. 137). Punctuation, then, functions to single out existing social conditions that need to be corrected. The second function of collective action frames, attribution, refers to the fact that these frames make both "diagnostic and prognostic attributions" (Snow and Benford, 1992, p. 137). In other words, activists attribute blame
for a problematic condition, and they suggest a route for changing the problem. Third, "collective action frames enable activists to articulate and align a vast array of events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and meaningful fashion" (Snow & Benford, 1992, pp. 137-138).

Collective action frames are significant to the culture of a social movement in that they reflect the ideas of a movement, and they emerge over the life of a movement. Successful movements, according to Snow and Benford (1992), construct "master frames" that profoundly influence how future generations of activists interpret and challenge the status quo. Taylor and Whittier (1995) explain that "[w]idely adopted master frames are successful because they resonate with the experiences of potential supporters and incorporate prevalent beliefs and concerns" (p. 168). Taylor and Whittier (1995) also note that this concept is directly linked to political opportunity structures "because it is, after all, the political and structural viability of a master frame that permits an idea to spread and gain adherents" (p. 168).

The notion that movements construct master frames is significant from the perspective of queer theory. Indeed, the queer movements construct a master frames of sorts, although of different types than those suggested by Taylor and Whittier (1995) and Snow and Benford (1992). For these sociologists, movements develop master frames in order to bring participant’s and potential recruits viewpoints into congruence with the goals and perspectives of the movement as a whole. In other words, master frames serves to help shape the collective identity of the group. These frames are necessary in order for the participants in movements to form a collective identity based on similarity. The queer
movements, rather than constructing frames that emphasize similarities, construct frames that emphasize differences among individual members of movements. Put another way, queers mobilize around the assumption that what queers have in common is that they are different from the mainstream in myriad ways, and that because of these differences they will never be allowed to participate fully within a system that will not accept difference. This is significant because, as I pointed out in chapter two, while some movements acknowledge diversity among social movement participants, no other movement has taken the radical step of defining itself in terms of both internal and external differences.

Queer activists strive to create a movement that is inclusive of practically every (sexual) identity imaginable. The word queer, in fact, emphasizes difference, and as the movement has emerged it has strived to create a space in which differences are not only tolerated, but are, in fact, celebrated. Queer activists have strived to construct a master frame that views sexuality as fluid and open. Taylor and Whittier (1995) argue that the emergence of queer theory in academia represents "a discourse that deconstructs the separate identities of lesbian and gay to recognize a shared queer experience and identity" (p. 170). On one hand, I agree with Taylor and Whittier on this point: certainly queer theorists and activists strive to trouble the categories of lesbian and gay in order to create a more inclusive movement. On the other hand, though, most queer theorists, I believe, would not see queer as being exclusive of gay or lesbian. For most queer theorists, these categories are one of literally countless possibilities. I also believe that queer activists seek to recognize the "shared" experiences of queers--particularly the oppression that queers have experienced at the hands of a heterosexist mainstream. It is important, though, to
recognize that the queer movement in many ways rejects the idea that we have any kind of "shared" experience; indeed, if we are to believe that reality is socially and symbolically constructed, no two people can possibly experience the world in the same way. In my view, the queer movement is appealing because of the very fact that it celebrates, and draws on, the diverse experiences that queers have had. In a sense, queers see themselves as similar because of the very fact that they are different from the (heterosexual) mainstream.

In terms of the recruiting members, the queer movements rely on an organizational structure that is non-hierarchical and decentralized. These groups have sought to give voices to all people silenced by the dominant structure. Cunningham (1992) explains that like "ACT-UP, Queer Nation is ferociously democratic and decentralized. Its founders were determined not to emulate what they called the 'hierarchical, patriarchal' pecking order by which most groups . . . are run" (p. 63). For this reason, Cunningham explains:

At every chapter, anyone who shows up at a meeting is instantaneously a full member. Some chapters are run by consensus; some simply function as a forum for people who want to recruit others for demonstrations. The prevailing aim—you could call it an obsession—is to exclude no one. (p. 63)

Frank Browning (1993) further describes how the style of Queer Nation meetings is designed to give a voice to all members:

The consensus style of QN [Queer Nation] meetings is highly ordered, allotting a set number of minutes for each of the sub, or focus, groups to speak about its activities. Women have become steadily more vocal, and real effort is made to reserve time for Asians, blacks, and Latinos to speak. If any person feels seriously insulted by a comment, he or she is urged to yell "Ouch!" and a "facilitator" will come to talk with the offended person and may even stop the meeting to discuss the aspersion. This active concern is part of the Queer Nation commitment to
creating a "safe space," a queer town meeting where the whole array of queer people will feel "empowered" to speak. (p. 41)

The attempt to give a voice to all members, however, has not been without problems. "Youth, combined with Queer Nation's adamantly non-hierarchical structure, may also partially account for the fact that the group is often disorganized nearly to the point of incoherence" (Cunningham, 1992, p. 66). In fact, many chapters of Queer Nation have disbanded because of unresolvable conflicts within the groups (Cunningham, 1992; Browning, 1993). Despite the potential for disarray, however, Queer Nation, and the queer movements in general, have challenged notions that help bind the dominant structure, notions that ultimately silence a large segment of society. As Frank Browning (1993) explains:

Even in its wreckage-strewn wake, however, the idea of queer sensibility has persisted—in the recognition that sexual dissidence involves more than white boys in tank tops; that bigotry and violence are not to be meekly tolerated at the hands of thugs, politicians, or employers; that the public display of affection will not be restricted to straight couples kissing each other good-bye at the morning commuter stop. (pp. 53-54)

Collective identity. Closely related to the notion of frames and emergent norms, the second framework that Taylor and Whittier (1995) suggest for understanding the cultural aspects of social movements is collective identity. This approach builds on the Marxist tradition, yet collective identity "is a more general term than class consciousness and is applicable to a wider range of contemporary challenges directed toward life politics as well as emancipatory politics" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 164). They argue (1992) that "[c]ollective identity is the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (p. 105; Taylor and Whittier, 1995). Most
work on the "new social movements" has focused on the role that identity plays in collective action. In fact, Taylor and Whittier (1992) contend that "[f]or new social movement theorists, political organizing around a common identity is what distinguishes recent social movements in Europe and the United States from the more class-based movements of the past" (p. 105; Taylor and Whittier, 1995). This represents a shift in focus and motivation for the new movements (e.g., the queer movement, the gay/lesbian liberation movement, the women's movement, and the African-American identity movement), and Taylor and Whittier (1995) point out that many new social movement theorists argue that "cultural and expressive elements of mobilization--sometimes referred to as 'identity politics'--are unique to recent American and European movements" (p. 172). Taylor and Whittier (1995) are quick to point out, however, that a substantial amount of research suggest that identity constructions are critical in understanding all forms of social movement activity, not just the "new" movements.

Taylor and Whittier (1992) propose a framework for discussing the ways in which participants in social movements construct collective identities. In particular, they suggest that the construction of identities in social movements can be understood in terms of three fundamental elements: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation or the politicization of everyday life. They stress that this model is "an attempt to theorize so-called 'identity politics' which makes the individual a site of political activity" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 173).

"The concept of boundaries," Taylor and Whittier (1992) contend, "refers to the social, psychological, and physical structures that establish differences between a
challenging group and dominant groups" (p. 111). In other words, boundaries serve to highlight differences between a marginalized group and the dominant culture. Taylor and Whittier (1992) acknowledge that while the dominant group generally creates boundaries to accentuate its differences from marginalized groups, "for groups organizing to pursue collective ends, the process of asserting 'who we are,' often involves a kind of reverse affirmation of the characteristics attributed to it by the larger society" (p. 111). Boundaries, in this view, are essential to the construction of collective identities because, while they highlight differences upon which oppression is founded, they also potentially emphasize the ways in which group members are similar to one another.

The second element of Taylor and Whittier's (1992) framework is consciousness. They argue that "the concept of consciousness . . . refer[s] to the interpretive frameworks that emerge from a group's struggle to define and realize members' common interests in opposition to the dominant order" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 114). Consciousness, then, is usefully viewed as the process by which groups come to understand themselves as a collective in opposition to an oppressive group. In addition, Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that the "important point is that collective actors must attribute their discontent to structural, cultural, or systemic causes rather than to personal failings or individual deviance" (p. 114). This is a significant turn from the early classical approaches which viewed movement participants as irrational and unwilling to conform to community standards.

Finally, Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that social movements develop strategies for negotiation. Negotiation refers to "the symbols and everyday actions subordinate
groups use to resist and restructure existing systems of domination" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 111). Put another way, activists find ways to make everyday life political "through the use of symbols and everyday actions to resist and restructure existing systems of domination" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 173). Furthermore, "the concept of negotiation points to the myriad of ways that activists work to resist negative social definitions and demand that others value and treat oppositional groups differently" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 118). Social movements are typically viewed as being explicitly confrontational in terms of the negotiation strategies used by activists. Taylor and Whittier (1992) suggest that two types of negotiations can be viewed as central to the formation of identities. First, groups negotiate ways of communicating within the collective group itself, but also with the public at large. Second, "identity negotiations can be explicit, involving open and direct attempts to free the group from dominant representations, or implicit, consisting of . . . a 'condensed symbol or display' that undermines the status quo" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992, p. 118).

As I have already suggested, the concept of collective identity is problematic from the perspective of queer theory. While the notions of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation are useful to a certain degree in explaining queer activism, it is important to recognize that these strategies all rely on the ability of a movement to construct a collective identity based upon the essential identities of movement participants. Queer theory rejects essentialist models that most identity movements rely upon in order to mobilize as collective groups. In recent years, there has been much debate over the utility of a politics based on identity (Butler, 1990; Cohen, 1991; Fuss, 1989; Seidman, 1993; de
Lauretis, 1991). Specifically, queer theorists are critical of liberation theory which emphasizes a unitary identity. As Diana Fuss (1989) argues, "[r]ecent gay theory . . . has increasingly rejected any such adherence to a natural, essential, or universal gay identity" (p. 97). Instead, queer theory and activism consciously avoids imposing such an identity upon queer people.

While the construction of a collective identity is useful in uniting an oppressed group against dominant society, as Taylor and Whittier (1992, 1995) suggest there are also serious drawbacks to adherence to such a perspective. Cherry Smyth (1992), for example, argues:

While the ground gained by identity politics in promoting equal representation and access to resources were important achievements of feminism, the rigid hierarchies of oppression that privileged certain oppressions above others were considered divisive and futile. (p. 26)

Queer theory rejects traditional identity politics which are based on the notion that members of a group share a common identity.

Indeed, some movements may recognize diverse qualities among participants, but they nevertheless focus attention on particular essential qualities of participants in order to mobilize effectively against an oppressive power structure. In other words, while differences do exist among participants, and different movements have be more or less willing to acknowledge these differences, they still remain committed to the idea that members share a basic essential identity that ties the oppressed together. In other words, these movements do not go to great lengths to emphasize these differences, and when difference is acknowledged, it is generally regarded as peripheral to the goals of the
movement. The queer movements, on the other hand, define themselves in terms of these differences. That is, the queer movements mobilize around the notion that queers are different not only from the normative mainstream, but from one another as well.

This does not mean that, at times, queers do not take on essentialist labels. Judith Butler (1991), for example, resists identity categories because they are restrictive and oppressive. She notes, however, that this "is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies" (p. 14). For Butler, then, queer critique does not necessarily mean abandoning identity terms. Instead, she advocates blurring the definitions of such terms.

Seidman (1993) contends that "[c]onstructionism provides a language highlighting social difference that marginalized lesbians and gay men can appeal to in order to legitimate their demands for recognition" (p. 127). Specifically, Seidman refers to differences between gay men and lesbians and the mainstream. The very language to which Seidman refers emphasizes similarities among gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, however. At first glance, this might not appear to be problematic. Arguably, to construct some common ground in order to form a cohesive group is necessary. The very construction of identities necessarily names certain characteristics that shape the identity (and, conversely, certain characteristics are excluded). The result is that identity formation essentializes the meaning of labels such as gay, or lesbian, or feminist, or African-American. Lance Selfa (1996) explains that identity politics are problematic because these tactics rely on essential notions of identity. He explains that the
"proponents of 'identity politics' argue that political activity is not simply a means to an end, but is above all, an affirmation of one's identity as a member of an oppressed group" (p. 46). Furthermore, Epstein, cited in Cohen (1991), observes:

[It is worth noting a peculiar paradox of identity politics: while affirming a distinctive group identity that legitimately differs from the larger society, this form of political expression simultaneously imposes a "totalizing" sameness within the group: It says this is who we "really are." A greater appreciation for internal diversity--on racial, gender, class and even sexual dimensions is a prerequisite if the gay movement is to move beyond "ethnic" insularity and join with other progressive causes. (p. 75)

Furthermore, Seidman argues that appealing to identities is rejected by many activists "because of its inherent instabilities and exclusions [emphasis added]" (p. 130).

From the perspective of queer theory, the liberation movements are problematic because the categories of gay and lesbian tend to reify dominant constructions of sexuality. In other words, the liberationists have tended to reinforce the dominant view that gays and lesbians have an essential identity that originated in mainstream theory. Hence, the result is not to change the dominant structure, but rather to force it (by embracing its oppressive assumptions) to allow gay men and lesbians participation in the system. Cohen (1991) argues, "[i]n the midst of this internal struggle between sameness and difference, it becomes difficult to align myself with a 'gay' collectivity, especially when the categories around which that collectivity asserts its coherence put my 'self' out of alignment" (p. 72). Many scholars have argued that queer, because of its ambiguous definition, results in a more inclusive movement (Morrison, 1992; Seidman, 1993; Smyth, 1992; Warner, 1993).

In other words, while liberation theory has been based largely on the notion of a "gay
essence," queer activists have problematized the meaning of queer. Margaret Morrison (1992) explains:

Because of the term's open definitional boundaries, each person can "reinhabit" the term and its associations differently, freely assuming a variety of its eccentric possibilities, including those that turn back on its old and pejorative associations, making what was once negative positive. (p. 14)

Although queer theory and queer activism can be usefully understood in terms of queer identity, it is also useful to understand queer as a movement against identity. In other words, queers have reconceptualized the notion of identity in such a way that it does not essentialize those who take on a queer identity. Queer theorists and activists develop a collective identity based on the idea that queers are unique not only from the mainstream, but from one another as well. For this reason, the movement can be understood as an identity politics based on differences and diversity.

Queer theory and queer activism have appealed to individuals who have felt marginalized within the gay and lesbian liberation movements. The liberation movements have been criticized for constructing an identity (indeed, an ideology) that is essentially white and middle-class. The gay liberation movement has been criticized for being exclusive of women, which resulted in the formation of separate lesbian movements. Furthermore, bisexual men and women have felt excluded from both the gay and lesbian movements which tend to be defined only in terms of same-sex desire. People of color have felt excluded from the liberation movements, as have less affluent individuals. Because the notion of queer is defined in terms of differences, the essentialism is, at least
theoretically, not a problem for queer activism and theory. At the very least, this
essentialism is significantly reduced.

The liberation theorists have generally argued that sexual difference is not
particularly important, that all human beings are basically the same regardless of sexual
identity, and that gays and lesbians should be treated no differently than other people on
the basis of their sexual identities. In other words, a primary goal of the liberationists is
the assimilation of gay men and lesbians into the mainstream on the basis that gays and
lesbians are essentially no different from their heterosexual counterparts (i.e. the
heterosexual mainstream). This was not always the goal of the liberation movements and
liberation theory. As Seidman (1993) points out, the liberationists initially "aimed at
freeing individuals from the constraints of a sex/gender system that locked them into
mutually exclusive homo/hetero and feminine/masculine roles" (p. 110). For any number
of reasons, however, the lesbian and gay liberation movements shifted away from this anti-
essentialist agenda, and, ironically, they have tended to emphasize a unitary identity in
order to mobilize as a collective group. In Seidman's view, the liberation movements gave
way to an "ethnic/minority sociopolitical agenda" (p. 110).

Diana Fuss (1989) agrees with Seidman's argument. She contends that the
concept of a "gay essence" helped organizers of the liberation movements to effectively
organize activism efforts. She argues:

Amongst political organizers in the gay movement, the notion of a gay essence is
relied upon to mobilize and legitimate gay activism, "gay pride," "gay culture,"
"gay sensibility" are all summoned as cornerstones of the gay community, indices
of a long-repressed collective identity. (p. 97)
The tendency of the liberationists to impose a unitary identity upon gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals is alienating to those who do not fit into the mold constructed by the leaders of these movements (generally speaking, well-off, white, gay men). Seidman (1993) acknowledges that "Although this model proved effective in socially mobilizing lesbians and gay men, its emphasis on a unitary identity and community marginalized individuals who deviated from its implicitly white, middle-class norms" (p. 110).

Nevertheless, the notions of boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation have some value in terms of explaining queer activism to the extent that identity constructions are understood as emphasizing differences among participants rather than similarities. Indeed, queer activists challenge boundaries, develop a queer consciousness, and develop strategies of negotiation to challenge existing structure of domination.

Queer activists uses two primary strategies to challenge the boundaries created by the dominant structure. First, the activists have challenged the notion of nationalism. Second, and related to the concept of nationalism, queer activists have challenged the notion of public versus private space.

Queer activists critically challenge notions of nationalism. They argue that U.S. national values and institutions exclude anyone who is not heterosexual. Queer Nation, for example, has sought to reconceptualize the notion of nationality to one that does not oppress through heterosexist values. Berlant and Freeman (1993) argue about Queer Nation:

Whatever they are, at the moment they are resolutely national. Queer Nation's nationalistic-style camp counterpolitics incorporates this discursive and territorial problem, shifting between a utopian politics of identity, difference, dispersion, and
specificity and a pluralist agenda in the liberal sense that imagines a "gorgeous mosaic of difference" without a model of conflict. (p. 197)

By creating a new nation—or at least a re-conceptualized one—Queer Nation erects new boundaries in which, at least theoretically, individuals are safe to express their individual identities.

Obviously, there are pragmatic reasons that disassociation with the dominant culture is an idealistic one that is not completely attainable. While this move toward a re-conceptualized notion of nationalism might be sound appealing, in reality it is not possible.

Berlan and Freeman (1993) explain:

[Di]sidentification with U.S. nationality is not, at this moment, even a theoretical option for Queer citizens: as long as PWAs (Persons with AIDS) require state support, as long as the official nation invests its identity in the pseudoright to police nonnormative sexual representations and sexual practices, the lesbian, gay, feminist, and queer communities in the United States do not have the privilege to disregard national identity. (p. 197)

To be sure, the queer movements are not the only movements to launch a critique on nationalism. Indeed, many movements have rejected U. S. national values and institutions, and have strived for reconceptualized value systems. Separatists, for example, disregard such models, and strive to create communities centered around shared values of the participants. Similarly, the recent African movements in the United States have rejected U. S. norms and values, and have emphasized, instead, a need to return to African values and cultural beliefs.

The second boundary strategy employed by queer activists is a fundamental challenge of the relationship between public and private space. The assumption of queer activists is that institutionalized heteronormativity prevents a large segment of society
from participating. Berlant and Freeman (1993) observe that queer activists understand "the propriety of queerness to be a function of the diverse spaces in which it aims to become explicit" (p. 199). These activists, then, attempt to expand the boundaries in which queer expression can occur. Queer Nation "names local and national publics; it does not look for a theoretical coherence to regulate in advance all its tactics: all politics in the Queer Nation are imagined on the street" (Berlant & Freeman, 1993, p. 199).

Signorile (1993), one of the co-founders of Queer Nation, describes some of the activities that the group has used. He explains:

Utilizing ACT UP's in-your-face tactics to take on gay-bashers and increase visibility, Queer Nation spawned chapters across the country. Its members invaded bars and restaurants to hold kiss-ins. Dressed in the most fabulous gay regalia, Queer Nation went into suburban shopping malls. Queer Nation also dabbled in outing, altering on-street advertisements that depicted celebrities endorsing products. If the celebrity was queer, like k. d. lang, the ad soon said so.10 (p. 88)

Perhaps the most fascinating strategy of the queer movements is the development of queer consciousness. Steven Seidman (1993) argues that the tactics of queer activists can be described as poststructural. Furthermore, James Darsey (1994) argues that the gay and lesbian movement is "the most thoroughly postmodern" (p. 47) of American social movements. While Darsey is making this claim about the gay and lesbian movement generally, it certainly is true of the more recent queer movements. Poststructuralism and postmodernism reject the categories and hierarchies created through modernistic thinking. In particular, the binary oppositions that ultimately ensure oppression are displaced in postmodern conceptions.11 The result of this displacement is that the very concept of identity is problematized. Seidman (1993) argues about poststructuralism generally that
"[i]mplicit in this subversion of identity is a celebration of liminality, of the spaces between or outside structure, a kind of anarchistic championing of 'pure' freedom from all constraints and limits" (p. 133).

Queer activists attempt the task of "subverting identity." In attempting to give voice to people marginalized by the heterosexist mainstream, queer activists do not define a "queer identity" per se. Rather, as Seidman (1993) notes, "under the undifferentiated sign of Queer are united all those heterogeneous desires and interests that are marginalized and excluded in the straight and gay mainstream" (p. 133). Because the term queer refuses to name an essential identity, people inhabit the term in different ways. Thus, queer activists celebrate the differences in the various individual identities among queers. The movements mobilize under a collective identity based on the uniqueness of individuals. To put this a slightly different way, queer activists argue that queers are similar to one another because they are different from the heterosexist mainstream.

Queers stand united in opposition to the dominant heteronormative social structure. In order to empower their members, social movements must develop a consciousness that opposes the ideology of the dominant group. Steven Seidman (1993) notes that queers "are not united by any unitary identity but only by their opposition to disciplining, normalizing social forces" (p. 133). Queer, paradoxically, refers to a celebration of difference rather than the imposition of a fixed identity. Seidman further explains:

In its resistance to social codes (sexual, gender, race, class) that impose unitary identities, in rebelling against forces imposing a repressive coherence and order,
Queer Nation affirms an abstract unity of differences without wishing to name and fix these. (p. 133)

By reconceptualizing the notion of identity--indeed, by asserting an identity based on difference--queers subvert the dominant structure by refusing to use its terms. By shaking up modernistic conceptions of classification, queers create a climate around which collective action and social change can occur. Butler (1991) argues:

If it is already true that "lesbians" and "gay men" have been traditionally designated as impossible identities, errors of classification, unnatural disasters within juridico-medical discourses, or, what perhaps amounts to the same, the very paradigm of what calls to be classified, regulated, and controlled, then perhaps these sites of disruption, error, confusion, and trouble can be the very rallying points for a certain resistance to classification and to identity as such. (p. 16)

Queer activists, in developing a consciousness based on difference, avoid the essentialist nature of the dominant codes and the modes of classification used both by the mainstream and earlier gay and lesbian liberation groups, and that are characteristic of identity politics in general. These activists strive to include anyone who feels oppressed by the dominant mainstream. Indeed, while queer activists certainly stress sexual difference, queer activists celebrate difference and diversity in terms of race, class, gender among its membership as well. These activists also strive to include other sexualities that are considered deviant by the dominant system (transgendered individuals and sadomasochists have found a place in the queer movement, for example). I discussed the notion of essentialism at length in chapter two.

Queer activists have changed the meaning of what it means to be involved in activism. Baker, Duignan-Cabrera, Miller, and Mason (1991) explain that "Queer Nation's controversial tactics are altering the way gays see and talk about themselves--and further
radicalizing their public image. Whether old guard liberationists like it or not, a fringe
group has taken center stage" (p. 21). Admittedly, queer activism has angered a lot of
people, including other gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. In fact, many members of the
gay, lesbian, and bisexual community believe that Queer Nation and the other queer
groups do more harm than good because they perceive the groups as perpetuating
stereotypes. This is not, however, a fair criticism of the group. Rather than perpetuating
stereotypes (or identities that are prescribed by the heteronormative mainstream), the
group, in fact, challenges the stereotypes by carrying them to "campy" extremes. Queer
activists challenge the assumptions upon which heterosexism or heteronormativity is based
by celebrating the diversity of the queer community or nation.

The negotiation strategies of queer activists attempt to challenge dominant
conceptions of how "homosexuals" should behave. Specifically, queer activists explicitly
challenge the assumptions upon which heteronormativity is based. These activists argue
that unless they are confrontational, their discourse will be ignored. Cunningham (1992)
explains:

Gay activists face a fundamental question familiar to feminists and civil-rights
leaders, among others. Do we play by the rules, court public sympathy, and push
steadily but politely for recognition? Or do we make ourselves so unpleasant that
yielding to our demands finally becomes easier than ignoring us? I myself favor
the noisier alternatives. I believe the AIDS epidemic has taught us that nobody
will listen unless we scream. (p. 63).

For many years, to ignore the demands of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals has been easy
because, for the most part, they have remained an invisible, and generally silent, minority.
Because of the highly confrontational strategies of queer activists, however, to ignore the new queer activists is almost impossible.

Ritual. A third potential framework for understanding the cultural development of social movements is ritual. Taylor and Whittier (1995) explain that this particular approach has not been explored as extensively as the collective action and emergent norm perspectives. Nonetheless, they argue that this perspective, which finds its roots in dramaturgical theory, is important because it "emphasize[s] the significance of ritual for expressing solidarity and evoking widely shared feelings among dominated groups" (Taylor & Whittier, 1995, p. 164). Taylor and Whittier (1995) find this perspective particularly useful in terms of understanding "ritual as a site for analyzing the emotions that mobilize activists" (p. 164).

Although some scholars (particularly Hobsbawm, 1959) have argued that ritual was a defining characteristic of "primitive" social movements, modern movements, while not devoid of ritual, are focused on more rational practices (Taylor and Whittier, 1995). Taylor and Whittier (1995), however, contend that much recent work indicates that ritual is still a significant aspect of social movements (p. 21). Taylor and Whittier (1995), drawing from Wunthow (1987), understand ritual as "symbolic expressive events that communicate something in a relatively dramatic way" (p. 176). They contend that ritual is significant because "rituals are the cultural mechanisms through which collective actors express the emotions--that is the enthusiasm, pride, anger, hatred, fear, and sorrow--that mobilize and sustain conflict" (Taylor & Whittier, 1995, p. 176).
Queer activists challenge the heterosexist idea that queers must keep their sexual orientations quiet. In fact, queer activists advocate "coming out," or disclosing one's sexual orientation, in all circumstances. Berlant and Freeman (1993) explain that these activists always "refuse closeting strategies of assimilation" (p. 199) and they strive "for the broadest and most explicit assertion of presence" (p. 199). Coming out accomplishes two important things. First, disclosure reveals to the dominant group that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals always have occupied supposedly heterosexual spaces. Second, coming out often reduces homophobia and heterosexism. As more people become aware that they have friends or relatives who are queer, they tend to become more tolerant of this marginalized group.

Through their radical political actions, queer activists demonstrate that queers are here to stay. Berlant and Freeman (1993) describe one of Queer Nation's specific actions aimed at the dominant mainstream:

Queer Nation's "Queer Nights Out" redress the more diffuse and implicit violence of sexual conventionality by mimicking the hackneyed forms of straight social life. "Queer Nights Out" are moments of radical desegregation with roots in civil rights era lunch counter sit-ins; whereas the 1960s sit-ins addressed legal segregation, these queer sortsies confront customary segregation. (p. 207)

These "Queer Nights Out" vary in terms of what happens. Queer Nationals might, for instance, go en masse to a straight bar. At the bar, the members dance together and, on cue, begin kissing. As Berlant and Freeman observe, the "banality of twenty-five same-sex couples making out in a [straight] bar . . . efface[s] the social distance crucial to the ordinary pleasures straight society takes in the gay world" (p. 207). These actions demonstrate two things to the heteronormative mainstream: "one, that gay sexual identity
is no longer a reliable foil for straightness, and, two, that what looked like a bounded gay subcultural activity has itself become restless and improvisatory, taking its pleasures in a theater near you" (Berlant and Freeman, 1993, p. 207).

Rituals are a major part of the queer movement, and they punctuate the underlying emotions of activism. Richard Goldstein (1993) describes some of the queer activities at the 1993 March on Washington:

[W]hen the shock wore off, I realized how much energy was devoted to rituals, many of them de facto and utterly gay: the perennial viewing of the AIDS Quilt, the flag-draped ceremony at Leonard Matlovitch's grave, the mass wedding at the Internal Revenue Service, the drag shows and gospel services, leather seminars and laying on of tefillin, queercore raves and lesbutante balls. (p. 23)

These actions, Goldstein contends, were not so much for political visibility—although they certainly made queers visible—instead, the actions represented "a rite of our own choosing, ostensibly to demand our rights but actually to be in one another's company" (p. 23).

In addition to reclaiming and reconceptualizing both private and public spaces, increasing queer visibility is another major goal of queer activists. Queer activists believe that significant change cannot occur until the mainstream recognizes that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are not the same as heterosexuals. Queer activists, if nothing else, have made it clear that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals should not have to "pass" as straight. Queer activists, like theorists, seek to bring issues of sexuality front and center. Sometimes, this is accomplished through radical, "in your face," political demonstrations. Frank Browning (1993) describes a particular type of action taken by queer activists to heighten awareness of sexual identities:
Mall actions are a mainstay of the Queer Nation, whether the malls are in suburban San Francisco, Chicago, or Union City, New Jersey. Gay men and lesbians, usually in a three-to-one male-to-female ratio, mount "queer visibility" expeditions, walking hand in hand into stores, shopping a lot, buying a little, and engaging in exaggerated mimicry of the straights who surround them. Occasionally, there is a kiss-in. The look is punk, drag, leather, bleached hair, dyed hair, earrings, ear cuffs, nipple rings, nose pins, scarves, streamers, and balloons. It's demonstration as picnic, picnic as political action. (p. 33)

Discourse. The final framework that Taylor and Whittier (1995) suggest for understanding the cultural dimensions of social movements is public discourse. They argue that much recent work "focuses on the new symbolic codes created by challenging groups that are expressed through a variety of forms of public discourse, including speeches and textual materials, myths, stories, and nonlinguistic modes of expression" (Taylor & Whittier, 1995, p. 164). This is a logical step, and is consistent with the collective behaviorists view that social problems are socially constructed (Taylor and Whittier, 1995). Furthermore, this is consistent with social movement research in the communication discipline which has emphasized the rhetorical nature of social movements, but has largely ignored the structural and organizational aspects of collective action.

Theorists who are exploring the discursive elements of social movements are interested in "how social movements affect and are affected by the discourse--or the language, ideas, interpretations, and symbols--of conflict" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 180).

Taylor and Whittier (1995) suggest that the emphasis on discourse in movements is a reflection of the trend toward cultural analysis that is becoming increasingly pervasive in the academy at large. Furthermore, the interest in discourse, as well as the influence of postmodernism, "open[s] more domains of life as contested terrain, changing the sites or
focus of collective action" (Taylor and Whittier, 1995, p. 181). The result of this is that new social movements tend to target not only the state as an oppressive institution, but other social institutions as well because they are responsible for the transmission of cultural codes—that is, they "create" a social reality in which groups are oppressed (Taylor and Whittier, 1995).

The discourse of queer activism challenges the assumptions of the dominant oppressive structure by reversing them. As noted above, Queer Nation has reconceptualized the concept of nationalism. The word queer, however, is significant in terms of the group's consciousness. In addition to representing a celebration of difference, queer also represents a reappropriation of the language used by the heterosexist culture. At least theoretically, by using the term queer, Queer Nation diffuses the hate and intolerance associated with calling someone queer. Indeed, the term queer has been used against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals as a derogatory term for years. Browning (1993) explains this phenomenon:

Very camp, very clever, very playful, it is all a variation on a general theme: Queers Have More Fun. Steal back all the hateful epithets thrown at gay people over the decades, turn them inside out, and celebrate them. (p. 34)

Furthermore, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in an interview with Chinn, DiGangi, and Horrigan (1992) argues:

I don't think what's being done is to disavow a lot of the negative stereotypes associated with it [the word queer], but rather to rehabit them in different ways. So people whose struggle really is to experience their sexuality as normal or to experience their bodies as normal are not likely to be attracted to the term; or they may be pressured into using it, but they won't get the full benefit of it. There are a lot of people that are gay that aren't queer. I think there are probably a lot of people that are truly queer that aren't gay. (p. 81)
Queer Nation's negotiation strategies attempt to challenge dominant conceptions of how homosexuals should behave, and these strategies are directly related to their discourse strategies. Specifically, Queer Nation explicitly challenges the assumptions upon which heteronormativity is based. These activists argue that unless they are confrontational, their discourse will be ignored.

**Summary: Moving Beyond Essentialism in Movement Studies**

Both queer theory and social movement theory have a great deal to offer in terms of our understanding of contemporary gay and lesbian activism. While I believe that new social movement theory is useful in understanding the emergence, growth, and decline of queer movements, the queer movements are unique from other identity political movements in a number of significant ways. In particular, as I discuss in the following chapter, a queer perspective relies on challenging a number of concepts that are central to other identity movements: notions of essentialism and assimilation, public versus private space, and collective versus individual identity, among others. Queer theory, then, provides a framework that is unique from other theories of social movements in many ways.

I have emphasized throughout this chapter that queer theory provides an important critique of the relatively "mainstream" gay and lesbian liberation movements that seems to get short shrift in academic theorizing. In communication studies, for example, research on gay and lesbian activism has largely privileged the liberation model (Chesbro, Cragan, & McCullough, 1981; Chesbro, 1994; Darsey, 1981; Darsey, 1994; Foss, 1994; Nogle, 1981; Robinson, 1981; Siegel, 1994).
Steven Seidman (1993) provides a number of criticisms of both identity politics and poststructural approaches. In Seidman's view identity politics—no matter how hard it strives for inclusion—produces exclusions. Furthermore, identity politics emphasizes "a narrow, liberal, interest group politics aimed at assimilation or spawns its opposite, a troubling ethnic-nationalist separatism" (p. 135). Poststructural approaches to activism (i.e. queer activism), in Seidman's view, lack coherence as a result of its "disruptive politics" (p. 135) and "anti-identity or postidentity standpoint" (p. 135). In addition, "[p]oststructuralism is a kind of reverse or, if you wish, deconstructive logic; it dissolves any notion of a substantial unity in identity constructions leaving only rhetorics of identities, performances, and the free play of difference and possibility" (p. 135).

Seidman's conclusion is that while identity politics tends to produce a strong politics at the cost of excluding individuals, queer theory and activism offers a weak politics that is more inclusive.

Seidman (1993) is critical of theories that tend to assume that identity categories of any kind—gender, sexual, ethnicity, class—can be isolated (p. 136). While this can be useful as an analytical tool, Seidman argues, "we must avoid reifying what are analytical and political moves" (p. 137). Instead, we must recognize that these categories intersect and overlap, and that we need to avoid assuming that individuals who share a social location (such as gender or sexual identity) share a common history—this is simply an incorrect/inappropriate assumption.

Finally, Seidman suggests that both scholars and activists focus more on the emancipatory potential of movements; we should focus on ways to achieve social
transformation rather than debate identity constructions. Personally, I favor the radical critique that queer theory provides, and I fear that no matter what intentions scholars and activists have, unless we confront the identity issue head on, exclusive practices in both theory and political action will continue to be a problem.

It is worth noting that my review of social movement theory has focused on the existing social movement theory in both communication and sociology, and with the exception of the queer movements and the gay/lesbian liberation movements, has not closely considered the actual historical practice of other identity movements. Indeed, while some movements do reject assimilation as a strategy—for example, the lesbian separatist movements, and the recent African movements in the U. S. (which focus on a "return" to African cultural ideals and values)—these movements still face essentialist identity constructions. In other words, they emphasize that there is an essential category of lesbian, or woman, or African, around which mobilization can occur. I don't mean to suggest, however, that these movements contend that all movement participants are essentially the same. Instead, while they might recognize diversity among members in terms of issues not directly related to activism, they forward the notion that participants are essentially the same in terms of their identities relevant to the movement itself.

The discussion of social movement theories in this chapter provides a necessary foundation for understanding the emergence of queer theory not only in communication, but in all other disciplines. Indeed, queer theory has become a highly interdisciplinary area of study. Communication scholars, I believe, have important expertise that is necessary in understanding these movements. Queer theory, furthermore, provides a framework to
begin to understand any movement that is anti-essentialist and/or anti-assimilationists. As
I have pointed out throughout this chapter, our current theories do not adequately account
for such phenomena.
Notes

1. For a comprehensive review of social movement theory and case studies in communication, see Simons (1970); Simons (1972); Simons, Mechling, & Schreir (1984); and Stewart, Smith, & Denton (1989).

2. Andrews (1983) further explains that "[w]hat historical scholarship should yield, in depth and in a systematic way, is a description and explanation of the unique patterns of rhetorical behavior and the relationship of those patterns to the social milieu in which they grew and developed" (p. 68).


4. Stewart (1983) calls for more studies of "typical social movements" (p. 78), because rhetorical theorists should construct theories that help serve a predictive function. In other words, Stewart believes the goal of rhetorical studies of movements should be to develop theories that are more readily generalizable to other movements. This perspective concerns me because it explicitly rejects movements that are extreme. (I am tempted to say "marginalized movements," although any movement is, by definition, marginalized.)

5. The rhetorical requirements of movement leaders are also discussed in depth in Simons (1970).

6. The framework developed by Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1989) is an extension of Stewart’s (1980, 1983) earlier work on functional approaches to social movement persuasion.

7. This is an apparent contradiction in Stewart’s work. Recall that he had been critical of "case studies" because of the "selected" nature of the messages that are used, and yet he makes the same suggestion here.

8. Obviously, Taylor and Whittier are making an implicit (whether intentional or not) suggestion that an understanding of communication and rhetorical theory is fundamental to understanding social movement activity.

9. I have tried to be careful throughout this dissertation in my use of the terms "heterosexual" and "heterosexual." In this case, when I refer to the "heterosexual mainstream," I am referring to the oppressive group. First, not all heterosexuals are heterosexual. Second, and more importantly, heterosexuals are not necessarily excluded from the queer movement. In fact, Ann Powers (1993) refers to the emergence of the "queer straight."

10. At the time, k. d. lang was still in the closet.
11. The most obvious way that sexual oppression is constructed is evident in terms of the heterosexual/homosexual dualism. As with other binary oppositions, the first term in the pair is privileged, while the latter is disprivileged. This dualism is particularly significant because when heterosexuality is seen as the norm, homosexuality is seen as deviant and, therefore, wrong. The terms heterosexual and homosexual rely on each other in important ways. Diana Fuss (1991) argues that "the denotation of any term is always dependent on what is exterior to it (heterosexuality, for example, typically defines itself in critical opposition to that which it is not: homosexuality)" (p. 1).

12. In fact, one of Queer Nation's slogans is "We are everywhere."

13. The continued valorization of liberation thinking is, frankly, surprising to me. In 1994, the Caucus on Gay and Lesbian Concerns of the Speech Communication Association published an edited volume, Queer Words, Queer Images, that, despite the "progressive" title, gives very little consideration to the emergence of queer theory.
CHAPTER 4

QUEER RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Introduction to Queer Criticism

Perhaps the most useful aspect of queer theory is the critical force that the perspective provides rhetorical scholars. In a narrow sense, queer theory provides the rhetorical scholar with a model to interrogate how sexuality plays a role in rhetorical practice. However, queer rhetorical criticism has broad implications for how differences of any kind play themselves out in communication. In other words, because queer theory raises fundamental challenges about the essential nature of identities, a queer perspective could be useful in understanding the fluid nature of any identity. Queer theory, as I have noted, can be viewed as an identity politics based on the differences of movement participant rather than on their similarities. In this chapter, I focus on discourses of sexuality. While the implications of queer theory are potentially broad—at least in terms of how identity is understood as a rhetorical construction—the my focus here is on issues of sexuality and gender.

In this chapter, I will examine a variety of rhetorical artifacts from a queer perspective to demonstrate the critical force of queer criticism. The artifacts are drawn
from a variety of sources. Some of the artifacts are from alternative sources, while others are from mainstream sources.¹

**Traditional Approaches to Rhetorical Theory and Criticism**

Traditionally, rhetoric has been viewed as the study of public address. Scholars examined public speeches that were delivered before an audience that the rhetor intended to persuade. This approach to rhetorical studies was significant and, indeed, has dominated rhetorical studies for centuries. The justification for such an approach is that public speeches—particularly those addressed to large audiences—are, obviously, significant rhetorical events. Put another way, the rhetorical act of public address had (and still does have) a significant impact on a large number of people. In recent years, many scholars have begun to reject that rhetorical significance is only related to the size of an audience. This critique arose for a number of reasons. First, generally, the only people in society with the power to address large audiences have been white, heterosexual, wealthy, men (i.e. those in society with privilege). Women, people of color, and other marginalized people typically do not have the resources to ascend to positions of power in our society. Thus, the traditional paradigm tends to disregard the voices of those people at the margins.

Second, many contemporary scholars argue that the majority of discourse takes place outside of the public realm. Indeed, to overlook discourse that is not “public” leaves the majority of our communication outside the realm of rhetorical studies. This type of communication is significant, then, because it has a marked affect on our daily lives.
The scope of rhetoric has varied widely in terms of different rhetorical theories. For some, the scope of rhetoric is limited to argumentative discourse (Toulmin, 1958). For others, the scope has been broader; rhetoric is limited to the study of any discursive symbols (e.g. Richards, 1936; Foucault, 1972). Still others have conceptualized rhetoric to include all symbolic activity in which human beings are involved (Burke, 1966; Burke, 1969). In the latter view, rhetoric includes not only linguistic texts, but other “texts” as well, including, for example, painting, music, and dance. Indeed, many (if not most) contemporary rhetorical scholars consider other forms of discourse (poetry, drama, literature, etc.) to be proper objects of rhetorical study. Further, many scholars have taken this a step further by arguing that any symbolic activity (linguistic or non-linguistic) is within the scope of rhetorical studies. These scholars argue that non-linguistic communication is as significant as linguistic discourses.

**Queer Approaches to Rhetorical Theory and Criticism**

**Scope.** Queer rhetoric is broad in its scope. While it certainly involves the study of language and discursive rhetoric, it also potentially includes any symbolic activity that focuses attention on sexual difference and identity constructions (a kiss-in, for example). At the same time, any queer rhetorical approach necessarily acknowledges that the world is diverse, and any framework consistent with such a conviction must recognize that difference is both desirable and unavoidable. With this in mind, the framework that I set up here is my own. It is, indeed, a framework for queer rhetorical criticism, and yet it is by no means intended to be the “last word” on queer analysis. For me to argue that this framework is the only way to do queer criticism would be, at the least, arrogant. I have
set this up as one approach to queer criticism. I believe, nevertheless, that this framework accounts for a number of issues that must be addressed in any queer model. Any queer rhetorical framework must pose critical questions about rhetoric that help to explain the role of difference in the construction of rhetorical messages. Put another way, queer rhetorical theorists are interested in the ways that sexual difference plays a role in rhetorical processes. I respect and encourage other approaches to queer analysis because I believe that no one framework can possibly account for all sexual differences. Queer rhetorical theorists, then, must hold firm to the belief that any one framework inherently privileges one world view over others.

Dominant vs. oppositional readings. In this chapter, I am working from the postmodern assumption that texts are read differently by different people. To put this another way, texts are open to both dominant and oppositional readings. People read (or see, or hear, etc.) texts differently because experience and identity are essential to how they understand the world. Furthermore, I assume that some texts lend themselves more easily to an oppositional reading, while for others a dominant reading may be more typical. An example of a text that has been read in multiple ways is the film version of The Wizard of Oz. The dominant reading of the film is that it is a charming children’s story about a young girl who wants nothing more to return to her family. Others have read the film as a commentary on economic conditions during the early twentieth century. Still others have given it a queer reading—the film is about a place where difference is celebrated.

A queer rhetoric, then, is interested in uncovering and emphasizing sexuality in general, and sexual difference in particular, even though the dominant or traditional
reading of a particular artifact might differ from a queer reading. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that queerness is pervasive in texts, even those that are not intentionally queer. At the very least, a queer reading of mainstream texts is possible. Doty (1993) for example, argues: “I’ve got news for straight culture: your readings of texts are usually alternative ones for me, and they often seem like desperate attempts to deny the queerness of what is so clearly a part of mass culture” (p. xii). Furthermore, Warner (cited in Doty, 1993) contends that queerness is everywhere—even when it is least expected:

Almost everything that would be called queer theory is about ways in which texts—either literature or mass culture of language—shape sexuality. Usually, the notion is that fantasy and other kinds of representation are inherently uncontrollable, queer by nature. This focus on messy representation allows queer theory, like non-academic queer activism, to be both antiassimilationist and antisseparatist: you can’t eliminate queerness, says queer theory, or screen it out. It’s everywhere.

There’s no place to hide, hetero scum! (p. xiii)

Queer rhetorical critics are also interested in pointing to the ways that discourse intended for a mainstream audience frequently includes queer suggestions and undertones. In other words, queer critics are interested in pointing out to the mainstream that they are always as “normal” as they would like to believe.

The 1930 film Morocco, starring Marlene Dietrich and Gary Cooper is an example of such discourse. In the film, Dietrich plays a cabaret singer who has a romance with a Foreign Legionnaire played by Cooper. In one of the first scenes, Dietrich comes onto the stage wearing a tuxedo and a top hat. She walks to a table and admires the flower that a
woman is wearing in her hair. Dietrich asks the woman if she can have the flower. Upon receiving an affirmative response, Dietrich thanks the woman by kissing her on the lips. Dietrich then walks back onto the stage, and tosses the flower at Cooper. The woman who gave her the flower, stands up and looks insulted that Dietrich gave the flower to another man. Most notably, Dietrich’s gender-bending guise is significant. As a woman in a man’s outfit, she becomes androgynous. In the film, Dietrich is not trying to portray a man; there is no attempt to hide the fact that she is a biological woman. This gender ambiguity makes both her interaction with the woman she kisses, and her interaction with Cooper’s character potentially queer. When Dietrich kisses the woman, the audience, as well as the characters in the film, know that it is a woman kissing another woman. When Dietrich throws the flower to Cooper, the ambiguity of her gender is potentially confusing. In other words, Dietrich is a woman impersonating a man, making an advance at another man. The fact that the woman Dietrich kisses appears to be jealous of Cooper only adds to the queerness of the scene. She has both literally and figuratively been deflowered by Dietrich, only to be rejected for another man. Laurens (in Epstein & Friedman, 1995) further explains:

So the thing worked for everybody of every sex. And what’s amazing . . . I don’t think they’ve done anything as delicious sexually as that since. They didn’t pretend it was anything but what it was. She was doing it to turn on both the woman and the man which appealed to everybody.

Sometimes the explicit messages in mainstream discourse are heteronormative, yet a queer reading is possible. Implicit messages are sometimes queer, or, at the least,
ambiguous. The 1948 western movie, Red River, is an example of a text intended for a mainstream audience with implicit queer messages. Red River is the story of a cattle drive across the Chisholm Trail in Texas, and stars John Wayne, Montgomery Clift, and John Ireland. As Murray (1996) points out, “[s]exual repression runs rampant in this film, between both male and female characters” (p. 178). In particular, the film involves sexual tension between both Clift and Wayne as well as Clift and Ireland. In one scene with Clift and Ireland, the two compare guns. The scene, clearly, has two meanings. On the one hand, the comparison of weapons is innocent. On the other hand, it is difficult to miss the sexual implications of the scene. In a line not unlike “I’ll show you mine if you show me yours,” Cherry (Ireland) says to Matt (Clift): “That’s a good looking gun you were about to use back there. Can I see it?” There is a brief pause and then he adds, “Maybe you’d like to see mine.” Matt hands the gun to Cherry who fondles it and says, “Nice... Awful nice.” The two then take turns shooting the other’s gun, flirtatiously complimenting each other on how well they each handle the weapon of the other. Arthur Laurents, a screenwriter, commenting on the scene noted that:

I think all minority audiences watch movies with hope. They hope they will see what they want to see. That’s why nobody really sees the same movie. Monty Clift and John Ireland knew what they were doing. I think that’s why the scene is, I think, almost funny. Because of their delight in playing the sexuality of the gun.

(In Epstein & Freeman, 1995)
The sexual undertones in the film Red River, are an example of a mainstream text that challenges the assumption that heterosexuality is the only sexuality that people experience in their lives.\textsuperscript{17}

Another example of a film marketed to a mainstream audience with a queer subtext was the 1959 remake of Ben-Hur, directed by William Wyler and written, at least in part, by Gore Vidal. The story centers around the rivalry between Ben-Hur (Charlton Heston) and Messala (Stephen Boyd). Wyler was concerned that the rivalry was insufficiently motivated by the political differences between the two characters. Vidal then suggested that the tension between the two men who had been childhood friends might be because their relationship had not always been platonic. Specifically, Vidal (In Russo, 1987) explains the conversation with Wyler:

I proposed the notion that the two had been adolescent lovers and now Messala has returned from Rome wanting to revive the love affair by Ben-Hur does not. He has read Leviticus and knows an abomination when he sees one. I told Wyler, “This is what’s really going on underneath the scene--they seem to be talking about politics, but Messala is really trying to rekindle a love affair,” and Wyler was startled. We discussed the matter, and then he sighed, “Well. Anything is better than what we’ve got in the way of motivation, but don’t tell Chuck [Heston].” I did tell Stephen Boyd, who was fascinated. He agreed to play the frustrated lover. (pp. 76-77)

While Heston remained oblivious to Boyd’s motivation, the film became an early example of queer subtext in a major motion picture.
Queer Criticism: Assumptions and Practice

With the notion of dominant and oppositional readings in mind, let’s consider an approach to queer rhetorical criticism grounded in the premises of queer theory. In this section, I briefly review the premises of queer theory and provide some rhetorical examples to help illustrate most of these ideas. Finally, I conclude with a complete analysis of one long text.

Premises and Examples

Challenge of essentialism. Because queer theory insists that essential notions of identity are problematic, queer theory insists that rhetors and audiences do not share common identities. Indeed, queer rhetors focus on the uniqueness of individual identities and celebrate the novelty of differences among all people. Put another way, queer rhetorical theory rejects any perspective that approaches rhetoric from a universal perspective. Rather than arguing that queers communicate in a particular way, queer theory explodes the notion that individual identities and differences are constructed, communicated, and performed by individuals, and that individual communication varies widely from person to person. Thus, queer rhetorics adamantly reject the idea that identity categories are a sufficient way to label the identities of groups of individuals. This is significant because queer rhetoric rejects any perspective that approaches discourse from a universal perspective. Furthermore, audiences are also composed of unique individuals; they are not the monolithic entities that mainstream theorists often assume.
Queer criticism examines artifacts for essential identity categories. Because queer theorists challenge the notion of a static, essential, or natural identity, a queer critique must focus on how identities are represented in the artifact. Queer criticism acknowledges that all human beings are, by their nature, unique. That is to say that no two people experience their identities in the same way. The critic engaged in queer criticism celebrates the diversity of humanity by emphasizing diversity and difference of those who are oppressed by the mainstream.

Jim Beam recently ran an advertising campaign designed to challenge traditional gender identity characteristics. In one of their advertisements, a seductive woman is shown smoking a cigar. To the side of the black and white picture, a caption reads: “Get in touch with your masculine side.” Under the caption is a small, color photograph of a bottle of Jim Beam whiskey. This advertisement pushes the boundaries of what is generally considered feminine. The ad implies that smoking a cigar is traditionally a male characteristic. Likewise, drinking whiskey is, supposedly, a male characteristic as well. The artifact challenges the notion that supposedly masculine gender characteristics are appropriate only for biological males.

Similarly, Chicago Bulls basketball player Dennis Rodman is perhaps better known for challenging gender roles than for his performance on the basketball court. Rodman frequently pushes the boundaries of both gender and sexuality. In terms of gender roles, Rodman challenges traditional notions of how men are supposed to behave; that is, he challenges what it means to be masculine or feminine. Rodman’s refusal to conform to traditional gender categories shocks—indeed offends—many people. Rodman frequently
colors his hair, wears clothing and jewelry that is generally worn only by women, and he paints his fingernails. Indeed, Rodman quips, “I can go out to a salon and have my nails painted pink, and then go out and play in the NBA, on national television, with pink nails” (Quotes on and by, 1997). On one occasion, Rodman donned a white, wedding dress and paraded through the streets of Chicago. On this occasion, he wanted to marry his fans. Arguably, Rodman likes the attention that he gets, and many would argue that he is only seeking publicity. Whether this is true or not, the fact that Rodman challenges the status quo notions of gender and sexuality is undeniable.

Let’s consider another example. Calvin Klein is well known for advertising that blurs the distinction between both gender and sexual binaries. The sexual and gender ambiguity in these advertisements is the result of using models who often look androgynous. In other words, it is often difficult to tell whether particular models are male or female. These androgynous models are typically posed in a variety of poses that are potentially sexual in nature. Even if the models only posed in dyads, the situations challenge normative notions of gender and sexuality since the models are generally androgynous. However, Klein pushes the envelope even further by having models posed in groups, suggesting non-normative sexual activity— that is, not male-female, and not dyadic. Such ambiguity is typical of Calvin Klein advertising. This advertising campaign is titillating in spite of, or because of, the queer nature of the situations depicted. Finally, Klein’s fragrance products (CK One, and CK Be) also challenge the notion that there are particular fragrances that are appropriate for each gender. Both products are marketed for use by either men or women.
Rejection of hierarchy. Queer rhetorical theorists firmly reject traditional notions of hierarchy. Queer rhetorical theorists seek to dismantle the hierarchical assumptions in the mainstream. In addition, queer rhetoric makes challenges to hierarchy that are not possible within the constraints of traditional liberation theory. Because liberation theory reinscribes categories, these categories cannot help but create a hierarchy where some categories are privileged over others. Instead, queer rhetoric seeks to dismantle all categories. This view of difference results in a social world in which particular differences are not privileged over other differences.

Privacy. Queer rhetoric insists that sexuality is a critical element of individual human identity. Foss, Foss, and Trapp (1991) contend that “gender is a critical dimension of humanness that functions as a lens that affects all human perceptions” (p. 322). Like gender, sexual difference functions much the same way: individuals understand the world based upon their individual identity characteristics. This lens serves to construct a world in which sexual differences between human beings are celebrated, rather than creating categories that draw attention to similarities.

Queer critics resist the notion that sexuality is only a matter of sexual behavior, and they contend that to reduce sexuality to this is to deny that sexuality comes into play in many aspects of life. To be sure, queer theorists and critics do not deny the relevance of sexual activity. However, these critics and theorists also contend that the imposed silence on queer sex is both hypocritical and puritanical. Nevertheless, queer critics must point out that sexuality cannot be reduced to sexual activity.
Thus, queer rhetoric raises a fundamental challenge to the idea that sexuality is a 
“private” matter that is not appropriate for public display. A great deal of mainstream 
rhetoric has argued, at least implicitly, that sexuality is best left to the bedroom. Queer 
rhetorical theorists contend that sexuality is always a fundamental part of everything that 
we do in our lives. Put another way, our sexuality is always present, and always influential 
in the decisions that we make about our life in general, and our communication in 
particular. Queer rhetoric focuses attention on sexuality whenever it is implicit or explicit 
in discourse. Furthermore, queer rhetoric insists that individual sexualities are a 
fundamental aspect of who we are as human beings; sexuality, then, cannot or should not 
be viewed as a peripheral issue of identity. In other words, sexuality is always—and, 
indeed, it must be—variably public.

Queer criticism, then, both draws attention to and challenges the notion that 
sexuality is a private matter that is best left in the bedroom. Queer critics are critical of 
the hypocritical nature of this assumption. For queer critics, when people suggest that it is 
inappropriate to discuss issues of sexuality, they are really talking about queer sexuality. 
The dogmatic insistence upon silence when it comes to queer sexualities does not seem to 
apply to those with normative sexualities. Queer critics draw attention to the fact that 
heterosexuality is frequently displayed publically. Such displays include the fact that 
heterosexuals are able to walk down the street holding hands, or sitting in the park kissing. 
It is not unusual to see heterosexuals have photographs of their husband or wife and 
children on their desk in the workplace. Marriage is another example of the celebration of 
normative sexuality—engagements and marriages are usually announced in the newspaper.
Beyond actual “sexual” behavior, though, queers are critical of the idea that queer relationships must remain hidden. For example, if a queer person had a picture of her lover sitting on her desk at work, this would be considered “flaunting” her sexual identity. If a queer man mentions his sexual partner (regardless of discussing sexual activities) to coworkers, his behavior is considered inappropriate.

Queer critics emphasize that when people suggest that sexuality belongs in the bedroom—that it is not appropriate to discuss such personal issues in public—these restrictions are directed at queer sexuality. When queers try to celebrate their relationships in similar ways, they are, at best, accused of making something public that people don’t want to hear about, at worst, they are accused of trying to destroy the most fundamental institution upon which society is built (the nuclear family). Queer critics draw attention to the hypocrisy of such a double-standard, and they emphasize that if people were secure in their own sexual roles they would have no reason to feel threatened by sexualities that differ from their own.

Heteronormativity. Queer rhetoric challenges the heteronormative assumptions in the mainstream. In other words, queer rhetoric insists that there is nothing that is necessarily “normal” about being heterosexual. In this world view, those who are not heterosexual are labeled as deviant. Put another way, when heterosexuality is seen as “normal” or “natural,” other sexualities are seen as “abnormal,” “unnatural,” or they are ignored entirely. In popular culture, this notion abounds. We are bombarded every day with messages that tell us that not only is heterosexuality the only acceptable way to live our lives, but a particular brand of heterosexuality is normative. That is, we are told
regularly by a variety of sources that, at least in the United States, the nuclear family is the foundation of everything that we believe as a nation. A queer rhetoric rejects the idea that normative heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexual alternative. Queer rhetorical theory is critical of dominant models that view heterosexuality as the only “normal” form of sexual expression because these models leave no room for discourses that come from other perspectives.

The critical force of queer rhetoric is that it illuminates normative heterosexual privilege in discourse. Put another way, queer criticism challenges the notion that traditional heterosexual relationships are the only normal sexual expression, to the exclusion of other sexual possibilities. Queer rhetorical criticism celebrates the range of queer sexual expression which can, indeed, include normative heterosexual expression to the extent that heterosexual constructions of the world do not dismiss or diminish queer sexualities. Put another way, many have argued that there are “straight queers.”

The debates in Congress during 1996 over the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) were filled with language that reinforced this notion (Smith, 1997). For example, these debates emphasized that “marriage is a legal bond between one man and one woman.” Even for heterosexuals, non-monogamous relationships are condemned, non-procreative relationships are not given the same emphasis in our society as relationships that produce children, to say nothing of relationships between members of the same sex, or combinations of more than two individuals regardless of the biological sex of the participants.
In addition to highlighting discourse that reinforces heteronormative assumptions as in the DOMA example, queer critics draw attention to discourse that challenges such notions. For example, Don’t Panic is a gay-owned and operated company that specializes in casual clothing (t-shirts, sweatshirts, baseball caps, etc.). The company is successful with both mail order business, as well as in their retail stores located in large queer communities (West Hollywood, San Francisco, New York, Southbeach, Provincetown, and London). The company recently ran an ad featuring a familiar painting: Leonardo DaVinci’s Mona Lisa. In the advertisement, the portrait has been altered so that the model is wearing a Don’t Panic t-shirt that says boldly, “Nobody knows I’m a lesbian.” The advertisement challenges our assumptions of what the reader expects the model to be—that is, heterosexual. The advertisement is eye-catching, and it makes most readers laugh because it is unexpected. The advertisement draws its force from the idea that most people naturally assume that everyone is heterosexual unless there is evidence to the contrary. Don’t Panic’s advertisement, and indeed most of their products are designed to make the unimaginable visible.

Queer critics draw attention to texts that emphasize sexual fluidity and ambiguity. Queer criticism should, whenever possible, demonstrate the possibility for multiple sexualities. In a recent advertising campaign, for example, Catalyst, a fragrance by Halston, ran an ad that was open to multiple readings. The advertisement includes a picture of William Baldwin, a well-known actor. Baldwin’s hair is disheveled, and he is wearing an unbuttoned white dress shirt (revealing his muscular chest) tucked into his trousers, and a dark sport coat. He is looking directly at the photographer with a smirk on
his face. Floating in front of the black and white picture of Baldwin is a ledge of some sort supporting three different shaped containers that apparently hold the cologne. There are two captions in the advertisement. The first, “Boys like to experiment,” is set on Baldwin’s bare chest. The second caption, “CATALYST,” is set on Baldwin’s crotch. This advertisement is rich in sexual messages, and is notable for the ambiguity that is present in the presentation. One reading of the advertisement might take a scientific approach—the containers look remarkably like beakers and test tubes. On the other hand, the beakers are also remarkably phallic in nature. In addition, the containers are different shapes and sizes. Hence, the advertisement suggests that “boys like to experiment” sexually with different possibilities. This includes, as suggested by the presence of the phallic containers, experiments with the same-sex.

Even the placement of the captions in the advertisement is sexually significant. In order to read the captions, the reader is drawn to both Baldwin’s crotch and his bare chest. Furthermore, one of the phallic containers (a test tube-like container) is placed so that it extends directly from the top of Baldwin’s trousers to the middle of his chest as if Baldwin has a rather long erection. It is important to note that the advertisement is apparently directed at men; in small type at the bottom of the page is the text, “The new fragrance chemistry for men. By HALSTON.”

Queer implies sexuality, and yet it does so without pinpointing single, stable, and specific notions of what form sex should take. A final example of a text that challenges heteronormativity is Madonna’s video, Justify My Love. The video has received considerable attention by both academics as well as popular writers and social critics.
(Henderson, 1993; Patton, 1993; Schwichtenberg, 1992). In the video, which was banned by MTV because of the sexual situations depicted, gender and sexuality are both blurred in much the same way as they are in the Calvin Klein advertising. Aside from Madonna and Tony Ward, a former gay porn model, the gender of every other character in the video is ambiguous. The video includes strong implicit representations of sexual activity between androgynous characters in both dyads and larger groups. The video presents “sexual, indeed homoerotic, images against the grain of repressive demonizing” (Henderson, 1993, p. 114). In one part of the video Madonna is shown on a bed kissing an ambiguously gendered model while Ward watches and is, obviously, titillated. In another part of the video we see one character drawing a moustache on another character while Madonna watches and giggles. In terms of costuming for the video, many characters wear leather chaps, hats, and teddies. Another character carries a whip. The message of the video is most clear in one of the lines from the song, “Poor is the man whose pleasures depend on the permission of another,” which is displayed as a caption against a black screen at the end of the video. As Schwichtenberg (1992) explains, “the video presents a grid-like structure with which to represent multiple points of sexual pleasure as split and dispersed across bodies, between bodies, on top of and beneath bodies: a plural assertion of sexualities” (p. 128). The video is an excellent example of discourse intended to challenge traditional notions of gender identity and sexual behavior.

**Assimilation.** Queer rhetorical theorists adamantly argue that queers are not interested in assimilating seamlessly into an unchanged mainstream. For example, queer rhetoric rejects the rhetoric of gay liberation that strives to make sexual identity something
that should ultimately not be a factor in determining who is allowed to participate in society, and who is not. Queer rhetorics argue that individual sexual differences are extremely significant, that queers are unique, and that these differences still do not justify oppression.

Queer criticism, them, takes aim at discourse that either reinforces assimilation as a goal for sexual minorities or challenges such notions. As an example of the latter, in his Obie award winning play, *Jeffrey*, Rudnick (1994) challenges assimilationist strategies by suggesting that essential notions of “gayness” are a farce. In the scene, Jeffrey has is visiting his friends Darius and Sterling (who are a couple). The three are having drinks before dinner and taking about relationships.

STERLING: You know, sometimes I think we should be on a brochure for Middle America. So that everyone can say, “Oh, look, a wholesome gay couple!”

JEFFREY: Excuse me? You’re not wholesome. You’re a decorator—excuse me, an interior designer—there, I said it without giggling. And you—you’re a dancer. You two are like Martha Stewart and Ann Miller. Which, believe me, I prefer. I hate that gay role models are supposed to be just like straight people. As if straight people were even like that.

STERLING: That’s true. I was watching these two guys on “Nightline,” on Gay Pride Day? [sic] And one of them said, “I’m Bob Wheeler and I’m a surgeon. And my lover is an attorney. And we’d like to show America that all gays aren’t limp wristed, screaming queens. There are gay truck drivers and gay cops and gay lumberjacks.” And I just thought, “Ooh—get her.” (p. 29)
In *Jeffrey*, Rudnick challenges mainstream notions of normative sexuality, and celebrates the diversity of relationships that many people experience in their lives.

Finally, it is important to remember that queer criticism has an explicitly activist agenda. That is, queer rhetorical criticism seeks to dismantle the existing social order that silences queer voices in our society. Queer rhetoric constructs a world in which sexual difference is not only acknowledged, but celebrated. Also, because queer rhetorical theory has an explicitly activist agenda, queer rhetorical theorists argue that it is not sufficient to point out that oppression and domination merely exist; instead, a major goal of queer rhetoric is to point to the potential for progressive change in the social structure.

**Pee-wee’s Queer Adventure**

The film and television work of Pee-wee Herman (the stage/screen name of actor Paul Reubens) provides interesting fodder for queer analysis. Perhaps the most interesting thing to note about this discourse is that both the television show *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* as well as two full-length feature films, *Bigtop Pee-wee* and *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, were geared to children. Indeed, *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* was a part of CBS’s regular Saturday morning line-up for several seasons. Nevertheless, they are all rich in potential alternative readings. In this section, I examine both the television series as well as the film *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*.

*Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, the Saturday morning television series, was based on *The Pee-wee Herman Show*, a "sexually risque work of performance art" (Penley, 1993, p. 132) that had been sucessfully produced in Los Angeles. In the television series, the sexual references were dealt with much more subtly than in the stage production for
obvious reasons. Penley (1993) explains that the stage production was "fully scatological (the secret word was ‘latrine’), and entirely sadistic and voyeuristic. There were jokes about wienies, doogy doo, underwear, open flies, vaginal smells, anal intercourse, masturbation, and sexually transmitted diseases, among others" (p. 132). Nevertheless, subtle references remained in the television series and films that followed the stage production.

**Characters.** In terms of challenging assimilation, Pee-wee Herman is much like Peter Pan: he is a boy who refuses to completely grow up. Indeed, in both the television series and the movies, Pee-wee lives alone in his "playhouse," and he associates with other characters who are physically adults and yet have never outgrown childhood. Pee-wee Herman rides a bicycle (indeed, the plot of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* revolves around Pee-wee’s search for his stolen bicycle), plays with toys (and his food), and revels in practical jokes (stink bombs, fake vomit, etc.). Pee-wee Herman, then, challenges the normative expectation that he should act like an adult.

The character of Pee-wee Herman is a camp version of the classic portrayal of homosexuals as sissies. The stereotype has been pervasive throughout the history of film and television. Even when, for any number of reasons, explicit references to homosexuality have not been permitted film makers have used "the sissy" to represent non-normative sexualities (Russo, 1987). While one might argue that Pee-wee Herman reinforces such a stereotype, the camp nature of his portrayal of the sissy might also be read as poking fun of the stereotype. The character of Pee-wee Herman is portrayed as an extreme version of the sissy: he dresses well (except for the white socks he wears with his
trademark grey suit), he skips, he giggles, indeed nearly everything that he does is carried to an effeminate extreme. While the characterization is carried to an extreme, Pee-wee still remains popular with most other characters in both the television program and in the films. Specifically, in *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, Pee-wee is embraced by a motorcycle gang, an escape convict, movie executives, and a super-feminine waitress (who I discuss below). In other words, Pee-wee is popular despite his sissyness—a break from the traditional representation of the sissy as something to be avoided.

In this body of work we find a myriad of characters who cross borders between normative ideas about sexuality, gender, and age. Cross dressing, for example, is a regular activity in Pee-wee’s world. In *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, Pee-wee dresses as a woman twice. The first time he dresses as the wife of Mickey, an escaped convict, who picked Pee-wee up while he was hitchhiking to Texas. Pee-wee’s plan was to divert attention from the police in a roadblock who were searching for the escaped convict. Not surprisingly, Pee-wee and Mickey are successful. Interestingly, though, Pee-wee in drag is a turn-on to both the officer at the roadblock and to Mickey. The officer asks Pee-wee to step out of the car so that he can look at "her" pretty dress, to which Pee-wee responds, "Why don’t you take a picture, it’ll last longer." After being cleared through the roadblock, Pee-wee remains in the dress (apparently content in the reversal of roles), and Mickey looks over at him with a lascivious grin, clearly titilated by seeing Pee-wee in a dress. The second instance of cross-dressing occurs later in the film when Pee-wee dresses as a nun in order to get onto a movie set. It is worth noting that nuns are
frequently the object of queer camp. This should not be surprising given the ambiguity of the lives and identities of nuns.\textsuperscript{10}

Pee-wee Herman’s films and television programs are packed with camp representations of particular identities, both male and female. In \textit{Pee-wee’s Big Adventure}, for example, several of the major male characters are presented as super-masculine. Specifically, the waitress’s boyfriend is portrayed as a jealous redneck complete with a hunting cap and red flannel shirt. Mickey, the escaped convict is also characterized as an exaggerated version of masculinity (in many ways reminiscent of the stalker in both versions of \textit{Cape Fear}).

Some of the most interesting camp characterizations in the film are female characters. Simone, the waitress who befriends Pee-Wee, is characterized as a super-feminine woman who wants nothing more than to go to Paris which she describes as the "city of dreams." Large Marge, the ghost of a truck driver who picks Pee-Wee up while he is hitchhiking is another camp characterization, but of a different sort than Simone. Marge is portrayed as a hyper-masculinized woman who drives a semi—an exaggeration of the stereotype that driving a truck is supposedly a man’s job.

Pee-wee’s Playhouse is also loaded with campy characters. Miss Yvonne, much like Simone, is represented as a super-feminine coquette—in this case, Yvonne even has big, blonde hair. Cowboy Curtis is portrayed as a caricature of rough and tough cowboy. The stereotype of the cowboy is taken one step further in the fact that Curtis is black. Tito, the lifeguard, is portrayed as a body building hunk with a perfect tan. It is also worthy of note that Tito rarely wears any clothing except for a skimpy bathing suit.
Balfour (1993) explains that the "one time Tito is compelled to dress up, he wears a purple tuxedo jacket without shirt, tie or pants. It is Tito, rather than any of the women, who ranks as the most eligible and desirable libidinal attachment in the topsy-turvy world of the playhouse" (p. 145). Pee-wee’s television series and films are loaded with example of characters that are icons of queer desire. Bruce (cited in Penley, 1993) explains that it is beyond the fact that Pee-wee is surrounded by attractive men,

it’s rather that each represents a specific gay male icon, prominent fantasy figures in homosexual pornography (although in the context of the Playhouse) made human and friendly), including the sailor (Captain Carl), the black cowboy (Cowboy Curtis), and the muscular, scantily-clad lifeguard (Tito), not to mention the escaped con (Mickey) in Pee-wee’s Big Adventure. (p. 133)

Finally, Jambi the genie, is a portrayed as a flamboyant character who grants Pee-wee one wish in each episode. Jambi is presented as only having a head, and he reside in a box with doors that Pee-wee can open and close. As Balfour (1993) points out:

It doesn’t take very long to recognize the gay subtext, intertext, or just plain text of the Pee-wee episodes, most clearly legible in the figure of Jambi, the drag queen genie adorned with a turban, flaming red lipstick, and a single earring. Jambi--a literalization of television’s "talking head"--is one of the few male characters on television to wear lipstick, and Pee-wee may by the only other one. (pp. 143-144)

In the stage production, Jambi receives a pair of hands that he ordered through the mail. When they arrive, Pee-wee delivers them to Jambi who asks Pee-wee to close the door because "there is something that I have been wanting to do for a long time."
Sexual innuendo. In terms of challenging assimilationist assumptions of sexuality, the discourse of Pee-Wee Herman is more subtle for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, sexual innuendo runs rampant in both the films and television series. Early in Pee-wee’s Big Adventure, Pee-wee is asked by his "girlfriend" Dotty about going to the drive-in with her. Pee-wee is visibly disgusted by the idea that he would go on a date with Dotty, and he replies to her by saying in the most butch voice that he can muster:

Dotty, there’s a lot of things about me you don’t know anything about, Dotty.

Things you wouldn’t understand. Things you couldn’t understand. Things you shouldn’t understand... You don’t wanna get mixed up with a guy like me. I’m a loner, Dotty. A rebel. So long, Dotty.

Pee-wee then turns, walks out of the store, and giggles the trademark "Pee-Wee-esque" giggle. This line can be understood on multiple levels. For children, it is not likely to have any meaning other than that Pee-wee is not interested in dating Dotty; young children, afterall, are seldom interested in members of the opposite sex (generally, they are perceived as having "cooties"). For a more sophisticated audience, the line potentially has much more significance; there are things about Pee-wee that are kept secret, and he rebels against mainstream norms of what it means to be a man. The line is almost prophetic in terms of what is still to come in the film. While there are certain aspects of Pee-wee’s identity that should be kept quiet (by normative standards), the audience occasionally gets a glimpse of them in the film.

As I pointed out above, there is an obvious need for subtlety in both the films and television series given that the target audience is children. Nevertheless, both the
television series and films are loaded with references to sexual difference. At the end of Pee-wee's Big Adventure, after Pee-wee has recovered his bicycle, most of the characters from the film are gathered at a drive-in watching Pee-wee's Big Adventure, apparently the Hollywood version of what had happened to Pee-wee. We see Pee-wee, apparently having just left the snack bar. As he is walking back to where he is watching the film, he walks past all of the friends that he has made during his adventure. When he reaches a grey bus, Mickey, the escaped convict, leans out of one of the windows to greet Pee-wee. Pee-wee tells Mickey that he has a "footlong" for him and winks. At this point, a guard checks the hot dog and finds a file hidden inside the bun. While it is unlikely that children would understand the sexual reference, most adults should see the blatant sexual reference. This reference is particularly interesting given the sexual tension between Pee-wee and Mickey while Pee-wee was in drag.

In the television series, sexual references are common as well. In one episode, at a playhouse party, Tito and Miss Yvonne are dancing and Pee-wee asks if he can cut in. Miss Yvonne nods her approval, and Pee-wee steps in and begins dancing with Tito. Only a few moments pass, and Pee-wee backs away from Tito giggling and begins dancing with Miss Yvonne. Although this is a brief moment, it is notable because it shakes the sexual order.

In another, lengthier example, Cowboy Curtis asks Pee-wee to coach him before his date with Miss Yvonne. Balfour (1993) explains that "Curtis complains of having never been out on a fancy date with a woman--one wonders if he’s been on any kind of date with a women--and the Cowntess (a cow who occasionally wears a muumuu) ropes
Pee-wee into pretending to be Miss Yvonne for Curtis’s benefit" (p. 145). At first, Pee-wee objects because he "doesn’t want to be a girl." Nevertheless, the Countess encourages him that he can have some fun with it. Pee-wee agrees, and dives into the role. He takes on a falsetto voice, talks about wearing lipstick (which, of course, he already does), hairspray and a dress, and flirts with Cowboy Curtis. After several minutes of this (sexual) play, Curtis attempts to kiss Pee-wee goodnight. Order is finally restored when Pee-wee protests to the kiss. This scenario is made even more significant by the fact that the moral for the show is "Be Yourself." Balfour explains that this moral can be interpreted in more than one way:

One imagines the reading the network and sponsors could offer with a sigh of relief: "Be Yourself" that is to say, boys will be boys, girls will be girls. For in the end the traditional shakedown of masculine boys and feminine girls is duly restored. But again the narrative resolution hardly obviates all that has gone before it. A principal effect of Pee-wee’s histrionics, whatever the outcome of the episode, is to unsettle culturally codified notions of masculine and feminine, indeed to twist them around. (pp. 145-146)

In another example from the television series, Pee-wee has decided to remodel and has invited all of his friends to help. Miss Yvonne shows up, as usual, wearing a formal dress (complete with frills). Pee-wee is concerned that Miss Yvonne’s dress will get dirty. Miss Yvonne tells Pee-wee not to worry about it because her motto, and the theme for this particular episode, is to "Be Prepared." With that said, she pulls a clear plastic overcoat out of her purse to cover her dress. In addition, she puts on a clear plastic cap to
cover her hair. The safe sex allusion is likely to be obvious to most adults watching the program, but it not likely to be clear to the child viewers of the show.

**Queer Assumptions and Pee-wee.** The early stage production, the television series, and the films of Pee-wee Herman are rich in examples of how queer discourse challenges normative dictates about sexual and gender identities. In particular, Herman’s characters challenge essentialist notions of what it means to be men and women, as well as essentialist notions of sexual identities (although these references are much more subtle). While on one level it could be argued that Herman’s characters reinforce essentialist stereotypes, it is important to consider the camp nature of their presentation. All of the characters in Pee-wee’s world are carried to extremes through the use of camp as a rhetorical strategy. So, rather than reinforcing the stereotypes, Herman/Reubens is making fun of them; he makes them seem silly and ridiculous.

Second, Herman/Reubens challenges the notion that individuals who are different should assimilate into the mainstream in terms of how they will behave, and with whom they will interact. Indeed, the message of Pee-wee’s work tends to be that people should not be afraid to be themselves, regardless of societal norms in terms of identity and behavior. For Herman, differences must be celebrated. As Perley (1993) explains:

> Although multiplying and celebrating ‘differences’ can risk leveling or vitiating crucial political categories of difference, I would argue that here, in the context of Saturday morning television, the Playhouse’s dizzying presentation of difference, accompanied by a constant plea for tolerance, show a sharp understanding of how
one might go about reordering (attitudes toward) difference, even under the gaze of the masters of the television universe. (pp. 137-138)

Finally, the notion that sexuality is something that should be kept quiet is dealt with an interesting way in the work of Herman/Reubens. On the one hand, given that the television series and films are geared to children, references to sexuality are generally quite subtle, or, at the least, well above the heads of children viewers. On the other hand, as I have already pointed out, the frequently explicit message of Pee-wee is that individuals should not be afraid to be individuals, and the diverse sexual references reinforce this message. In other words, the message to a sophisticated audience is that sexual differences exist, should be celebrated, and should not be kept silent.

Summary

Queer rhetorical theory emphasizes differences in our communication with one another. In other words, unlike the liberation rhetorics, queer rhetoric does not seek to demonstrate how human beings are similar, but it focuses, instead, on difference as a site of power and knowledge. Put another way, queer rhetorical theory rejects the notion of “grand theory.” It is not possible to make sweeping claims about the ways that queers (or anyone else for that matter) communicate with one another. Instead, queer criticism examines rhetorical artifacts for the ways that an artifact either challenges or maintains a status quo in which differences are denigrated.

Queer criticism, like queer theory and activism, has an activist agenda. Queer critics do not stop after describing rhetorical practice. This criticism is particularly useful in the sense that it helps us understand how power relationships have been constructed,
why these relationships are problematic, and how differences can be a progressive site for social change.

Queer critics challenge the binaries that have been used to construct a social order that silences sexual differences. Queer criticism is useful in helping people to understand that the world would be a better place if we celebrated differences, rather than forced people to fit into molds of what most consider “normal.” Queer criticism, then, highlights heteronormativity in mainstream and liberation discourse.

Furthermore, queer rhetorical critics seek to dismantle hierarchy by blurring the definitions of specific identity categories. In other words, queer critics de-emphasize the specificity of all identity categories (gay, lesbian, straight, etc.). Ambiguity is frequently introduced to demonstrate that few people actually fit into the rigid limits of such categories. Queer criticism is guided by the assumption that when definitions of “normal” begin to shift, particular differences will not be privileged over others. Obviously, this is an ideal that queer theorists and queer critics are working toward.

To summarize, queer critics are not interested in only demonstrating that oppression exists. A queer rhetorical criticism, instead, is interested in demonstrating: (1) that queer perspectives are not valued, (2) that queer experience is frequently silenced, (3) that heteronormativity is rampant in both theory and discourse, and (4) that difference—particularly sexual difference—is an important, and largely unexplored, site for social change. Queer criticism, while taking aim at identity categories and the effects of such categories, does not abandon identity as a site of knowledge and political activity, but attempts to render identity permanently open and contestable as to its meaning and
political role. Put another way, queer critics shift the terms of identity. Rather than focusing on identity and group identification from the perspective of essentialized similarities, queer critics point to the differences that exist among members of groups. Rather than dismissing any particular sexual identity, queer critics are interested in creating a changed social structure in which all sexual identities are celebrated, and no identity is perceived as better or more appealing than any other.
Notes

1. By “alternative” sources, I am referring to the gay/lesbian/bisexual press and the queer press. Many publications are geared to a specific audience, and I hesitate to label all of them “queer.” The Advocate, for example, is probably the best known magazine geared to the “gay and lesbian community.” The publishers of The Advocate would likely resist a “queer” label. (Other examples of the gay/lesbian/bisexual press include Genre and, as suggested by the title, 10 Percent.) Examples of the queer press are more difficult to find. In fact, like queer activist groups, queer publications tend to be short lived. An example of the queer press would be Planet Homo, a short-lived publication in Los Angeles. Finally, Anything That Moves, is a bit more difficult to place. This publication, geared to bisexuals, clearly poses many of the challenges that are consistent with queer theory, and I would likely place it in the “queer” category. However, some bisexual theory relies on essentialist notions of identity, not unlike gay and lesbian theory.

2. Throughout his life Montgomery Clift had a relatively fluid sexual identity. As Murray (1996) explains:

Clift's sexuality was rather well-known in Hollywood (on the set of The Misfits, Clark Gable referred to him as that faggot"), though he did his best to keep his private life just that. He wasn't always successful: In 1949, he was arrested for trying to pick up a hustler on 42nd Street; the charges were subsequently dropped. Though a bisexual who took delight in sexual conquests of both men and women, Clift was not totally comfortable with his gayness (which was his preference), and he was often tormented by it. This anxiety, coupled with drug and alcohol abuse caused the actor to burn-out before his time. John Huston, who directed Clift in The Misfits, said, 'The combination of drugs, drinking and being homosexual was a soup that was too much for him.' Clift died of a heart attack at the age of 46. (p. 178)

3. The flirtatious relationship between Clift’s and Ireland's characters is not the only example of a queer subtext in the film. In fact, the relationship between Clift's character and John Wayne's character, while far from explicit, also challenges heteronormativity. The sexual tension between the two characters comes to a climax at the end of the film when "Hawks' only use for Joanne Dru is to have her tell John Wayne and Montgomery Clift what we can already see. ‘Stop fighting! . . . You two know you love each other’" (Russo, 1987, p. 78)

4. Even if filmmakers had wanted to include explicit references to non-normative sexual identities, they would have never been able to get past the censors that read all screenplays prior to production from roughly the late 1920s through the early 1960s (Russo, 1987). As Vidal (In Russo) explains, “As for overt homosexuality in pre-1960 films, it was not attempted and not possible. Sonnets have fourteen lines. You
wrote sonnets then and there was never an extra or an odd line . . . but subtexts did occasionally insert themselves” (p. 62).

5. I should note that this does not reduce to a binary relationship between heterosexual and homosexual, or straight and gay. Instead, queer rhetoric focuses on the relationship between heterosexuality as "normal" and queer as deviant. It would be accurate to contend that queer theory forces a binary between normal and queer. This binary, however, is non-essentializing. That is, queer allows for a range of identity characteristics without fixing them.

6. Indeed, Madonna, in general, has become the focus of much academic study (Bordo, 1993; Hallstein, 1994; Hallstein, 1996; Kaplan, 1993; Mandziuk, 1993; Morton, 1993; Nakayama & Peñaloza, 1993; Pribram, 1993; Schulze, White, & Brown, 1993; Scott, 1993; Tetzlaff, 1993).

7. Queer theory and queer rhetoric respond to this approach by pointing out that it de-emphasizes the importance of sexual identity.

8. In fact, Reubens generally takes on the character of Pee-wee Herman outside the context of the television program and films. Rather than listing Paul Reubens in the credits of the productions, Pee-wee Herman is listed as the star. In fact, Penley (1993) points out that when reporters have been granted an interview with the star, they "are warned that they will be interviewing Pee-wee, not Paul Reubens" (p. 130).

9. Russo (1987) also notes the sexist nature of the sissy stereotype. He contends that:

   Homosexuality in the movies, whether overtly sexual or not, has always been seen in terms of what is or what is not masculine. The defensive phrase "Who's a sissy?" has been as much a part of the American lexicon as "So's your old lady."

   After all, it is supposed to be an insult to call a man effeminate, for it means he is like a woman and therefore not as valuable as a "real" man. The popular notion of gayness is rooted in sexism. Weakness in men rather than strength in women has consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behavior and deviant sexuality. And while sissy men have always been signaled a rank betrayal of the myth of male superiority, tomboy women have seemed to reinforce that myth and have often been indulged in acting it out. (pp. 4-5)

10. This is not the only instance in Pee-wee’s work that he poses as a nun. In one episode of Pee-wee’s Playhouse, he takes out a pair of giant underpants and demonstrates how useful they can be. In the skit, "he places a pair of truly humongous Fruit of the Looms over his head to show how this simple everyday garment can be turned into a nun’s habit or Rupunzel’s flowing hair" (Penley, 1993, p. 126).
11. The idea that intimacy with girls is something that Pee-wee wants to avoid is clear throughout Pee-wee’s films and television programs. In one episode of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*, Miss Yvonne suggests that the characters play house. Miss Yvonne takes on the role of the mother, and convinces Pee-wee to take on the role of the father. Balfour (1993) explains:

Daddy has to go off to work and as it happens Pee-wee wants to be an astronaut. When he returns from out of this world with the gift of a moon rock, the gift isn’t enough for Miss Yvonne and she asks if she can’t have a little kiss? Pee-wee balks at the suggestion and declares that the game is over. Miss Yvonne, however, insists on continuing to play and it is only the arrival of the mail-lady that successfully interrupts and ends the game. Is Pee-wee here the little macho boy grossed out by the prospect of consorting with girls, or is he rather another sort of boy, one who simply isn’t interested in girls? (p. 146)

12. Interestingly, the film version that all of the characters watch at the drive-in exaggerates the events of the original story, but in a different way than in the "actual" film. Pee-wee is played by Charles Brolin, and Dotty is played by Morgan Fairchild. What we see of the "metamovie," is an action film featuring martial arts. Pee-wee (Charles Brolin) searches for his motorcycle that was stolen by a group of thugs.

13. Each episode of *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* has an explicit moral upon which all of the playhouse activity revolves.
CHAPTER 5

QUEER THEORY AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

One of the major functions of the school as an institution is to assist in the child's growth of autonomy as a social individual. Implied in this is the development of the sense of self. This sense of self, which begins in infancy, includes not only internal intrapsychic components but also the management of social roles. Adolescence involves the expansion of this ego identity, particularly in the realm of social roles. (Uribe & Harbeck, 1992, p. 12)

Traditionally, schools have been places where, ideally, worthwhile knowledge is transmitted to all students. However, as Giroux (1989) notes "[in] this rosy and cleansed view of schooling, issues relating power, knowledge, and domination drop out of existence" (p. 6). As Frances Maher (1985) notes that the "traditional version of education as the wisdom of generations is especially pernicious for women (and other oppressed groups) because its content has often ignored or demeaned them" (p. 30).

I am particularly interested in pursuing a question put forth by Tierney (1993): "How do we create understandings across differences so that we are able to acknowledge and honor one another, rather than bring into question one another's legitimacy?" (p. 25).

As part of this project, we must begin to think ethically and critically about what discourses of difference mean in our classrooms. To the extent that the voices of any group are silenced or degraded in such institutions this is, unquestionably, an ethical
problem. Queer theory, though, offers an opportunity to view difference in a new light.
Rather than focusing on group identities, queer pedagogies insist that identity is individual;
all human beings have individual differences worthy of consideration and validation.
Queer pedagogies insist that the range of differences should be acknowledged and given a
voice, and that they are, indeed, sites where important learning can take place for all
students. To work within the terms of queer theory when considering pedagogical stakes
results in a consideration of how discourse constructs particular realities in which other
possibilities either cannot or will not be considered. A queer pedagogy challenges the
view that difference (sexual or otherwise) is an unproductive "disruption" in educational
settings. Britzman (1995) explains that we must think "through structures of disavowal
within education, or the refusals--whether curricular, social, or pedagogical--to engage a
traumatic perception that produces the subject of difference as a disruption, as the outside
to normalcy" (p. 152). Indeed, queer pedagogy emphasizes difference as an inevitability in
education that, as in the world outside educational institutions, can be productive when it
is recognized and celebrated--not simply "tolerated."1

Universalizing Discourses, Heterosexism, and Identities

Critical instructors must make every effort possible to create universalizing
discourses in their classrooms. Sedgwick (1990) distinguishes between the universalizing
view and the minoritizing view. She differentiates them by

seeing the homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active
importance primarily for a small, relatively fixed homosexual minority (what I refer
to as a minoritizing view), and seeing it on the other hand as an issue of
continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of
sexualities (what I refer to as a universalizing view). (p. 1)
Minoritizing discourses deal with issues of difference, yet they do not stress the relevance of such differences to all people. Indeed, minoritizing discourses construct the binary oppositions (man-woman, heterosexual-homosexual, self-other, etc.) that ensure oppression of all non-normative individuals. Britzman (1995) further explains the distinction between minoritizing and universalizing discourses:

Whereas minoritizing discourses close down—to the small space of minor subjects—the question of whether a particular experience is relevant or not, universalizing discourses begin with a view of identity as a category of social relations. . . . A universalizing discourse attempts both to study these relations and the refusals to recognize the relational, and to provide techniques that might pose as a problem the differential responses to a condition, experience, or technique. (pp. 156-157)

While many well-intentioned instructors raise issues of difference in the classroom, they do not emphasize the universal implications of such discourses. In other words, difference, when mentioned at all, is brought up in passing, or is treated as an exotic or bizarre case or exception. Instead, these instructors tend to introduce marginalized groups as voices who deserve to be heard, typically as a separate unit in a course. Indeed, such attempts at promoting tolerance are well-intentioned, and yet they reinscribe differences between normal-deviant and self-other. Furthermore, by reinscribing these differences the divisions between the mainstream and any particular other are reinforced. Such strategies, ironically, perpetuate the very problems that they are trying to alleviate by emphasizing normative and deviant identities. In terms of sexual difference, minoritizing discourses produce heterosexuality as the social norm, and all other sexual difference as abnormal or deviant. In other words, minoritizing discourses reinforce the heteronormative mainstream. The message that is sent to students, then, is that difference is abnormal and
something to be avoided at all costs. Thus, such minoritizing discourses fuel homophobia. Suzanne Pharr (1988) defines homophobia as the "irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex" (p. 1). Heterosexism is defined by Altman (1982) as "that ideological structure that assumed heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as deviant and, indeed, despicable" (pp. 110-111).³ Although queer theory and queer pedagogy are concerned with difference (sexual or otherwise), and not necessarily with same-sex desire, these concepts nevertheless have important implications for any queer project. The definition of homophobia, in particular, can be extended so that it is understood as an irrational fear of people who differ from mainstream notions of normative behavior.

Because the goal of a queer pedagogy extends beyond the idea that queer identities and notions must simply be added to the mix, queer theory generally, and queer pedagogy specifically, challenge heterosexism and homophobia in ways that more traditional approaches are not able. Queer pedagogy resists the notion that our classrooms and institutions are "melting pots," where our students come together and emerge into a collective one. Instead, thinking through a queer pedagogy involves a radical overhaul of our thinking about differences and their relationship to our teaching. Put another way, queer pedagogy requires "something larger than simply an acknowledgment of gay and lesbian subjects" in our classrooms (Britzman, 1995, p. 152).⁴

**Queer Pedagogy as a Critical Pedagogy**

Queer pedagogy shares many commitments and concerns with feminist pedagogy. Like queer theory, feminism challenges gender norms and conventions about sexuality.
Furthermore, because of their concern with emancipation, their experiential base, and their 
oppositional stance, both queer pedagogy and feminist pedagogy are species of critical 
pedagogy. In this section, I discuss some of the premises of critical pedagogy in general, 
and I highlight the queer implications of these assumptions.

**Critical Pedagogy and the "Banking" Model of Education**

Theories of critical pedagogy, generally speaking, have emerged as a reaction to 
the traditional "banking" model of education. In this model, teachers are considered 
experts and students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. Moreover, 
students are expected to unconditionally accept that the knowledge imparted by the 
teacher is the truth. In traditional models of education, students are expected to not 
question the validity of the claims made by a teacher. Often, the claims made by teachers 
are in conflict with the lived experience of students. Paolo Freire (1993) explains further 
that:

> The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, 
and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential 
experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the content of his 
narration—contents which are detached from reality disconnected from the totality 
that engendered them and could give them significance. (p. 52)

Freire contends that the banking model of education dehumanizes both students 
and teachers. He asserts that a liberatory pedagogy "must be forged with not for, the 
oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their 
humanity" (Freire, 1993, p. 29). In other words, students must necessarily be active 
participants in the interrelated processes of learning and teaching toward an emancipatory 
goal.
The feminist classroom has a similarly liberatory goal, to focus instruction on the ways in which patriarchy, as an ideology, is designed to oppress people. By making students aware of the oppressive nature of patriarchy, they will begin to question the values of a system entrenched in patriarchal assumptions. Miller (1985) notes that:

feminist mastery ... [is] a subversive move and not ... a gesture of docile complicity and ideological collusion. What I seek to do in the classroom, therefore, is to expose at all times the blind spots in the dominant codes (and modes) of meta-critical discourse as they are pressed into the service of a feminist analysis. (pp. 196-197)

**Critical Pedagogy and Experience**

The feminist classroom is designed to engage, rather than to dismiss, students' experiences as a "fundamental aspect of teaching and learning" (Giroux, 1989, p. 7). Feminist pedagogy challenges the assumption that subjectivity is an inferior, or even invalid, type of knowledge. Coming at the issue from a feminist perspective, the traditional view of education is that it must be objective, a trait that is generally linked with masculinity. Johnella Butler (1985) explains that "[c]hallenging pedagogical issues arise from this subject-content which attacks long-held assumptions and perceptions, ingrained, incorrect information and scholarship, and the 'common wisdom' of everyday attitudes and wisdom" (p. 232). In a similar vein, Patti Lather (1991) observes that feminist pedagogy "denies the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive, and knowledge as immutable material to impart" (p. 15). A critical pedagogy, then, directly challenges traditional hierarchies in the classroom by denying the notion that any knowledge is objective, and that instructors are the only possible source of knowledge in
the classroom. Critical pedagogies, instead, insist that such beliefs are at best arrogant, and at worst destructive.

Because all individuals speak from unique positions, all individuals in the classroom are potentially rich sources of information and experience. Critical pedagogies work from the assumption that we can learn a great deal about both self and other by engaging the experiences of all individuals. Indeed, critical pedagogies insist that all knowledge is subjective in nature, and that lived experience is no less important than other forms of "objective" learning. By allowing students to discuss their individual experiences they are empowered, and their lives and individual identities are validated in the process. In other words, students are given the opportunity (often for the first time) to discuss how their unique perspective informs the subject matter of the course. Such a platform is affirming for students to the extent that they have generally been told that talking about the experience is either inappropriate or irrelevant. Giroux explains that "a feminist pedagogy affirms student experiences by giving students the opportunity to speak from their own histories" (p. 7). Maher (1987) further explains that "[i]n this process they [the students] learn more about these structures and about themselves within them" (p. 93).

Reflexivity in the Classroom

In an emancipatory classroom, instructors encourage students to speak from their personal histories, but the work does not stop there. It is also imperative that the participants in the emancipatory classroom are reflexive about the experiences that are shared. This reflexivity, according to Freire (1993) should take the form of dialogue. He explains that "[c]ritical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried
on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their struggle for liberation" (p. 47).

Additionally, Patti Lather (1991) observes that "reflexive practice is privileged as the site where we can learn how to turn critical thought into emancipatory action" (p. 13). This reflexivity is crucial, Freire contends, because without it the oppressed will still be objectified:

> Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated. (p. 47)

Patti Lather (1991) contends that "[f]eminism's long standing tendencies toward self-reflexivity provide some experience of both rendering problematic and provisional our most firmly held assumptions and, nevertheless, acting in the world, taking a stand" (p. 29). Queer pedagogies, like feminist pedagogies, must rely on the practice of self-reflexivity. A queer pedagogy must critically explore the ways in which dominant thinking silences or degrades differences as well as a consideration of the effects of our own teaching strategies and discourse.

Queer pedagogies in particular, focus attention on the myth of essential identity categories, and thus the myth of binary oppositions. Because queer theorists challenge the way in which identities are constructed—that is, they are always restrictive and exclusionary—queer pedagogy further deconstructs these categories and makes the limitations of such categories apparent. Queer pedagogies are interested in proliferating identities—in pointing out that few of us fit into tidy identity categories. In this way, a queer classroom is the site of literally an endless possibility of lived experiences. When
students understand that identity categories are not real, binary oppositions become futile as a means of oppressing non-normative members of society.

**Queer Pedagogy and Empowerment in the Classroom**

**The Assumptions of Queer Theory in the Queer Classroom**

Queer pedagogies insist that sexuality is a central aspect of human life; sexuality is not something that should be absent from the curriculum. Furthermore, as I have already pointed out, too often scholars ignore the reality that the dominant paradigm is heteronormative. Simon Watney (1991) notes that "the question of sexuality remains in abeyance, since our respective education systems manifestly fail to acknowledge the actual diversity of human sexuality within the curriculum or outside it" (p. 387). A queer pedagogy affords opportunities to students that traditional education does not; it empowers students who have historically been silenced by the normative mainstream. In addition, an emancipatory pedagogy helps students to understand the ways in which normative discourses serve to oppress people.

**Queers are in a state of crisis both within our educational institutions and outside in the "real world."** Because of the heterosexist nature of the educational institutions in our country, the experiences of these students are often devalued at best, and, at worst, they are ignored altogether. We must take a close look at the myths that we perpetuate about our society through our teaching.

**Queer pedagogy offers an important opportunity for all students to discuss their individual experiences.** A queer pedagogy seeks to value the experiences of all students, particularly to the extent that they have been oppressed by the heterosexist nature of the
normative mainstream. DeVito (1981) explains that we must be concerned with the education of all of our students:

gay and straight—regarding such issues as the stereotypes of the gay and the lesbian that exist in the minds of students and readers which are far removed from reality and which are damaging to self-actualization and to meaningful interaction and communication. (p. 199)

Queer pedagogies, then, are concerned with challenging institutional heterosexism and heteronormativity. Queer pedagogies assumes that heterosexism is a prevalent feature of our culture, and such a pedagogy strives to illuminate heteronormative ideas through reading, writing, and discussion. To this end, a queer classroom strives to empower the voices of all students, regardless of their individual identities. This may seem confusing given that I have argued that queer theory strives to subvert identity categories. While most queer theorists resist collective identity categories, queer theorists emphasize individual identities. Queer theory and pedagogy strives to give voices to diverse identities without "fixing" them. The goal of a queer pedagogy is, as Britzman (1995) explains "that the truth of the minority might persuade the normative folks to welcome the diversity of the other, maybe to transform—at the level of very transferable feelings—their racist, sexist, and heterocentric attitudes" (p. 159).

Queer pedagogy, then, focuses on individual identity categories and their construction, and not on how we function in collective groups. Furthermore, queer pedagogies involve a critical and reflexive view of identity. For example, in the view of queer theorists, the fact that one student identifies as "gay" may mean something very
different than the fact that another student also identifies as "gay." A queer pedagogy highlights and gives a voice to these differences.

**Dangerous Memories**

I am attracted to Tierney's (1993) suggestion that we must encourage our students to share "dangerous memories" (p. 147). Dangerous memories, are those stories and experiences that have been silenced by the power of the norm... Memories that have been silent or subjugated are "dangerous" because developing voice inevitably involves issues of power. When people gain voice, they speak, and when they speak, the organization will have to respond. (p. 147)

Encouraging students to speak from the personal experiences, especially when those experiences have been given little or no voice in the past, is a direct challenge to the norms of both educational institutions and society at-large. When we encourage students to speak from the position of their individual identities and life experiences, we find that not all students experience the world in the same (normative) way.

To be sure, encouraging students to share their experiences--their dangerous memories--is risky business. As teachers, we have the responsibility to our students not to put them in danger either physically or psychically. For example, if we encourage a student to discuss his experiences with same-sex desire, and he is physically attacked on his way to his car after the revelation, we probably have done the student an injustice. The same is true is students are subject to verbal taunts or abuse from other students. Obviously, instructors can never be sure when the risk of such violence exists, but they can take certain precautions. First, they can encourage students to share their experience, and underscore the importance of not sharing if the student senses such a threat. Second,
if instructors have had personal experience feeling different from the norm, they can talk about the feeling of empowerment that comes from being given a voice. In any case, instructors should always strive to create a climate of respect for differences. One way to assure that the such a climate is created is that instructors can tell students at the outset of the course their approach to difference, and that respect (not acceptance) will be demanded of them during the term. Instructors should emphasize that violations of this basic rule will not be tolerated. When problems do arise, instructors must be prepared to confront them. The actions that instructors might take may take many forms. A teacher might talk individually with students to work through difficult situations. In more extreme cases, instructors might consult with the campus or local police about the situation. Instructors must realize, too, that they have limitations. To this end, instructors should be prepared to refer students to other resources when they are not able to resolve such difficulties (e.g. psychotherapists, physicians, social workers, etc.).

Allowing students to discuss their experiences accomplishes several things. First, it demonstrates that there is more than one possible world view--it enables participants to see that there are different perspectives--not just one that is inherently heterosexist, sexist, racist, classist, etc. Second, allowing students to speak about themselves is empowering for groups and individuals who have traditionally been silenced by an educational institution working in the service of a normative society.

bell hooks (1994) correctly points out that students are not the only participants in the classroom who need to take risks; instructors must be willing to share dangerous memories, too. She explains that "empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be
vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (hooks, 1994, p. 21). In fact, in order to create an environment in which the engagement of experience is able to occur, teachers might find it useful to take risks early on. Ideally, this will demonstrate to students that it is alright to share intensely personal experiences in the classroom.

**Reflexivity**

As educators, we have a responsibility to allow our students to be critical and self-reflexive about their individual life experiences. Furthermore, encouraging "dangerous memories" helps us to better work with people who are different from ourselves. Tierney (1993) explains that we "listen to individual's stories so that we might understand their views of the world, and in doing so, we may have to radically transform our own understandings" (p. 145). Encouraging this activity is one of the primary ways in which critical pedagogies work to subvert the dominant mainstream. In other words, students must be critical of the stories that are told, and they must be willing to interact with one another about their experiences. The point that I am trying to emphasize is that experience must be engaged, and not simply accepted at face value. Freire notes that "[a]uthentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (p. 58).

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) suggest that reflexivity is an ongoing process between students and other students, and students and teachers. They explain:

In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write--sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges
lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and
intellectual life of their community. Without them, individuals remain isolated
from others; and without tools for representing their experiences, people also
remain isolated from the self. (p. 26)

When these personal experiences become a part of research and pedagogy, the
participants--both students and teachers--come to understand how individual identities
(sexual or otherwise) are constructed, and how these constructions serve to oppress
certain individuals and empower other individuals.

Encouraging students to speak from experience must be undertaken with caution.

Often, as Scott (1992) explains,

the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the
workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation
(homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white as fixed immutable identities),
its premises about what that mean and how they operate, its notions of subjects,
origin, and cause. (p. 25)

Queer pedagogical practices are based on the assumption that no experience is absolute,
that experiences vary widely among different individuals, and that identity is constantly in
flux. Because critique is a central function in a queer classroom, all experience is
challenged. Indeed, a queer pedagogy focuses attention on the very issues that Scott
raises in her groundbreaking essay. Rather than simply accepting any experience as an
absolute explanation, a queer instructor delves into the questions of ideological systems.

The Risk of Reinscribing Normative Beliefs

The critical instructor must be aware that the practice of allowing students to share
their experiences has inherent risks. Because no student is silenced, some students may
describe the ways in which the mainstream has served them. Some students are likely to
share their own heterosexist, sexist, classist, or racist viewpoints. Giroux (1989) explains that the critical teacher must allow these sentiments for two reasons. First, these are the experiences which have shaped the lives of the students. Second, giving these experiences a voice gives the class the opportunity to understand what is potentially problematic about such views. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons that no experience should go unchallenged.

An important and crucial aspect of critical pedagogies is to help students to understand the ways in which certain experiences are oppressive to some members of society. Culley and Portuges (1985) note that "[t]o take student voices at face value is to run the risk of idealizing and romanticizing them" (p. 2). Thus, as Giroux (1989) explains:

... it is necessary for feminists [or other emancipatory teachers] to engage critically the limits and contradictions of student experiences and view them as intrinsic components of the stories and traditions the students bring with them into the classroom. This means educating students not only to read these codes critically but also to learn the limits of such codes, including ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories. (p. 9)

Through the process of analyzing and evaluating experience, students come to understand how normative discourses serve to oppress individuals who are different. Through critical reflection, students develop an understanding of how experiences are entrenched in normative thought and values. Students can then begin act to change their beliefs, or, at least, consider what might be problematic about their beliefs. Hence, it is vital that the teacher not make the mistake of letting any experience go undiscussed or unquestioned.
The Risk of Shifting the Terms of Power

Another concern with emancipatory pedagogies is that the oppressed will attempt to shift the terms of power to the extent that the oppressed come to power, and the oppressors become the "new" oppressed. This must not be the goal of any critical pedagogy. Freire (1993) warns:

In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.

The purpose of a liberatory curriculum is to empower students who have previously had little or no voice in their education, and, in the process, to shatter the binary oppositions that keep particular members of society oppressed. Put another way, critical pedagogies must work toward abolishing hierarchy, not toward reinventing a new one.

Obstacles and Strategies

hooks (1994) points out that "[m]aking the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy" (p 39). Nevertheless, such an approach is not without obstacles. Indeed, a queer approach to the classroom is likely to create a number of problems for students and teachers. Some students and teachers might be uncomfortable abandoning traditional--and comfortable--ways of teaching and learning (through the banking system). I hope that hooks is right when she contends that "students are more willing to surrender their dependency on the banking system of education than their teachers. They are also more willing to face the challenges of multiculturalism" (hooks, 1994, p. 40). Most professors are unwilling to desert methods that have seemingly worked in the past. As teachers, we
need to constantly be reflective about the methods that we employ in the classroom.

While our teaching might be effective for some students, we need to ask ourselves who is being excluded in our pedagogical practices. We also need to reflect on whose interests our discourses serve.

Working with resistance. Resistance is likely to be a major obstacle in such a pedagogy. Resistance can take a couple of different forms. First, resistance will occur because a queer pedagogy insists that students consider perspectives that are starkly different from their own. Britzman (1995) suggests that normative discourses create a situation in which there are possibilities that cannot be imagined by many students and teachers. A queer pedagogy, Britzman contends,

requires an impertinent performance: an interest in thinking against the thought of one's conceptual foundations; an interest in studying the skeletons of learning and teaching that haunt one's responses, anxieties, and categorical imperatives; and a persistent concern with whether pedagogical relations can allow more room to maneuver in thinking the unthought of education. (p. 155)

Critically engaging such limits is vitally important in a queer pedagogy, yet they are undeniably hard work for both teachers and students. There are three basic strategies for confronting such resistance. First, perhaps the most important strategy that a teacher can use in such cases is to ensure that all experience and readings are carefully scrutinized. Arguably, opening students’ experiences to scrutiny may have a chilling effect on the willingness to open up in the classroom. However, when students begin to see that such scrutiny can be intellectually rewarding—and that everyone will be scrutinized—they are more likely to participate. Instructors should discuss with students how such a perspective will help students to learn, and how it will help all of the students learn to be
more prepared for the diversity that they will experience when they enter their careers. In addition to this initial discussion, students should be reminded regularly throughout the term the purposes of this approach.

Second, at the outset of a class, instructors can make it clear to students that such participation in the class is not an option. Instructors should discuss this with students on the first day that the class meets, include a statement about participation of the course syllabus, and remind students of this rule throughout the course of the term. If a strong case is made for such an approach is made, students who are not willing to participate will likely disenroll (hopefully they will return during another term when they are better prepared to participate in such a classroom).

Third, and finally, an instructor can explicitly acknowledge that confronting difference, and engaging alternative perspectives can be painful. Nevertheless, a queer pedagogy is based on the assumption that the only way that we can begin find meaningful ways to live in a diverse world is to make the time, to exert the effort, and to take the risk to understand and engage different realities. As Tierney (1993) explains,

Difference is confusing and threatening because we are forced to confront ideas and lives that often bring into question our own commonly held assumptions and beliefs. If we are unable to participate in dialogues that question our views of the world, then we have not been engaged in cultural learning. (p. 146)

A second reason that resistance is likely to occur is that sharing personal experience is often risky business for students. In many cases, there are strong reasons that students keep their experiences private. For example, many students fear the act of "coming out" because of the very real risks of physical and psychic violence as well as
ostracism. A person with AIDS is likely to be hesitant discussing his or her experiences with HIV because of the stigma still associated with the disease.

Creating a conducive environment. hooks (1994) points out that among instructors there is the feeling that the classroom should be a "safe" place. She points out that this "usually translates to mean that the professor lectures to a group of quiet students who respond only when they are called on" (hooks, 1994, p. 39). A queer pedagogy does not aim to create a "safe" classroom. Indeed, such a space tends to reinforce the normative mainstream by keeping differences silent. hooks explains:

The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students . . . may not feel at all "safe" in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement. (p. 39)

Nevertheless, instructors must create a classroom environment where students are encouraged to share their experiences, and to respond to the experiences of others. Whenever deeply held beliefs, attitudes, and values are central to a discussion, a classroom can never be completely "safe." This is even more true when all experience is open to critical engagement. In other words, challenge and critique of one's experience is likely to present discomfort for students. In this view, then, all experience is "dangerous."

Teachers must create an environment in which difference is valued—not accepted at face value—and respected.

hooks (1994) suggests that rather than the creation of "safe" classrooms, instructors should seek to develop community in the classroom. She contends that building community helps "to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor" (p. 40).
Furthermore, hooks argues that, "rather than focusing on issues of safety, I think a feeling of community creates a sense that there is a shared commitment and a common good that binds us" (p. 40). In other words, we need to continually emphasize to our students why such an approach will help them to learn and be more successful in their lives outside the classroom.

I agree with Tierney (1993) who suggests that cultural learning involves "the development of, and engagement in, dialogues of support and understanding across differences. The geography, temporality, and discourse of these dialogues are powerful signals about one's desire to engage in cultural learning" (pp. 144-145). The instructor that encourages such discourse in the classroom must recognize that sharing dangerous memories is part of a growing process for students (and, also, for faculty). And, to be sure, convincing students to share profoundly personal experiences in the classroom takes time and effort.

Alternating reading practices. Britzman (1995) argues that the fundamental aspect of a queer pedagogy is to encourage students to alter reading practices. In fact, her hope is that students will "stop reading straight" (p. 151). She suggests that we need to teach students two inter-related steps in reading. First, students must begin "reading for alterity" (p. 163). As she explains, "reading must begin with an acknowledgment of difference as identity and not reduce interpretation to a confirmation of identity" (p. 163). I agree that encouraging students to read for difference is critical. However, this is certainly not an easy process. The risk is that when a student confronts difference, difference will serve as a confirmation of the student's identity. In other words, a student
is likely to confront difference and respond in such a way that s/he feels more separated from the "other" than ever before. This can, hopefully, be avoided by convincing students to ask questions as they read. For example, "Who am I becoming through the interpretive claims that I make upon another and myself?" (Britzman, 1995, p. 163), or "Where am I in this text?"

Britzman's (1995) second suggestion is that we encourage students to engage in dialogue with the text. She explains that the "text and the self perform differential replies, perhaps in the form of a question, perhaps an argument, perhaps a refusal" (Britzman, 1995, p. 163). Readers must constantly question what it is that they are responding to as they engage a text. Reading begins, as Britzman suggests, with the assumption of difference and division.

We must constantly encourage our students to ask questions about the beliefs that they hold dearly; and we must constantly ask these questions about our own beliefs and practices. Tierney (1993) suggests that such self-reflexivity is critical for those of us engaged in a transformative pedagogy. Smyth (1992) suggests a series of questions that teachers ask themselves about their pedagogical practices. I believe that these questions are also relevant questions for students if we hope that they will become critical thinkers, and, indeed, cultural learners:

What do my practices say about my assumptions, values, and beliefs. . . ?
Where did these ideas come from?
What social practices are expressed in these ideas?
What causes me to maintain my theories?
What views of power do they embody?
Whose interests seem to be served in my practices?
What constrains my view of what is possible in teaching [or other practices]? (Smyth, 1992, p. 299)

In order to help our students to live in a world full of differences, educators face a tremendous challenge. We must challenge the assumption that all of our students fit into essential identity categories. This involves not only challenging heteronormativity, but it also involves challenging the assumption that all students share the beliefs of the normative mainstream. We must value the experiences of all students, and the positions from which they speak and learn.

Summary

Individuals who are different are typically silenced in the classroom. Kate Adams and Kim Emery (1994), discussing coming out in the classroom, explain that:

When lesbian and gay men feel they must suppress something so central to their identity as sexuality, something that constructs their societal relationships as well as their sense of community, then they teach out of a context of anxiety. They speak encircled by silence, and both they and their students are cheated out of the full use of an important teaching tool. (pp. 25-26)

Queer pedagogy serves to empower students and teachers by encouraging them to share their experiences, and the ways that their experiences have affected their individual identity. Because all oppressed groups are muted by the dominant and normative mainstream, this experience is particularly important for members of these groups.

Queer theory offers an opportunity to articulate "pedagogies that call into question the conceptual geography of normalization" (Britzman, 1995, p. 152). Britzman (1995) contends that such a venture is an ethical project. She notes that educators must think "ethically about what discourses of difference, choice, and visibility mean in
classrooms, in pedagogy, and in how education can be thought about" (Britzman, 1995, p. 152). Britzman is correct in arguing that (re)thinking the role of difference in our educational institutions and strategies is an ethical imperative. We often hear that citizens of the 21st century must be able to function in culturally diverse communities. If we believe that this is true, educators have an ethical responsibility to all students to celebrate, not to silence them. Tierney (1992) emphasizes:

We learn about difference by existing in communities of difference—communities of diverse races, classes, genders, and sexual orientations. . . . One central strength of the United States is in its diversity, and academe's obligation is to ensure that we capitalize on that strength. (p. 46)

Queer theory provides an opportunity to build the communities of difference that will become essential for our students in the coming decades in terms of their ability to function in a diverse society.

Emancipatory pedagogical techniques, while not a total solution to the oppressive nature of society, can go a long way in subverting the fear and hatred of queer people in our society. These pedagogical strategies can help our students realize that their experiences are significant in the "real world." Freire (1993) contends:

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. (p. 62)
Notes

1. **Tolerance** is a problematic concept because people are often willing to "tolerate" the perspectives of others who are different, as long as they don't have to hear about it. For example, many heterosexuals take the view that they don't have any problem with queer people, but they don't understand why queers need to be public about it. Such a view is, obviously, problematic. This is one of the reasons that queer theorists challenge the notion that sexuality is a private issue.

2. Such strategies serve to further marginalize non-normative groups and individuals by compartmentalizing them. In other words, by setting "gay issues" (or any other difference) apart reinforces the view that difference is something that is not central to all discourse. Queer pedagogy rejects this notion.

3. Although Altman refers to homosexuality in his definition of heterosexism, this can be extended to any individual sexual identity. Indeed, when heterosexuality is considered normative, any other identity is, by definition, aberrant.

4. Indeed, language is a problem in this case. Traditional definitions of homophobia tend to focus on the fear of people who are attracted to people of the same-sex. In the case of queer theory, the concept must be understood in a broader sense.

5. Most queer theorists would likely agree that there are degrees of the objective-subjective continuum, and that queer pedagogy is likely to be a more effective strategy in some types of classrooms as opposed to other. What I have in mind here, in particular, are courses in the social sciences and humanities. Queer pedagogy is likely not to be useful in the biological and physical sciences, for example.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Scope of this Study

In this dissertation, I have presented queer theory as a fertile ground to better understand how human beings construct individual identities and communicate about difference. Queer theory, as I have noted, is a relatively recent development in social criticism, and the literature on queer theory is growing exponentially every year. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines, particular in the humanities and social sciences, have embraced queer theory because it presents a fresh way of understanding the role of identity in nearly every activity in which human beings engage, including their communication. Queer theory requires that scholars and activists question the assumptions that we make about the social construction of the world in which we live. While I certainly do not mean to suggest that queer theoretical perspectives are the final word on how individuals construct reality, they do remind us that no one perspective is capable of presenting the "whole truth."

In the first chapter, I discussed the emergence of queer theory and activism as a response to late 20th century political and social theory that has not been able to
adequately account for the diverse voices in our culture. In particular, most theories that
deal with marginalized groups tend to do so by emphasizing essential constructions of
identity. In other words, these theories explain group mobilization and cohesion by
assuming that members of a particular group share a common identity.

In terms of rhetorical practice, identity political movements such as the black civil
rights movement and the women’s liberation movement has also relied upon essentialized
notions of identity in order to effectively mobilize against the mainstream forces that
oppress them. Much like these movements, the gay liberation movement has relied upon
the model of identity politics as well. The result of this strategy has been that many people
have felt excluded from these movements because their understandings of their own
identities have been incongruent with the essential identities constructed by the leaders of
the movements.

Queer theory and activism, then, emerged as a direct response to this kind of
theory and practice. The queer movements, as well as queer theory, have adopted a
thoroughly postmodern view of identity because these activists and theorists adamantly
reject the binary oppositions that are created through traditional identity politics. Because
of the unwillingness to define essential identity categories, the queer movements have
embraced individuals who have been marginalized within the traditional liberation
movements. As Irvine (1996) explains:

Queer theory builds on social constructionism to further dismantle sexual identities
and categories. Drawing on postmodern critiques, the new theoretical deployment
of queerness recognizes the instabilities of traditional oppositions such as
lesbian/gay and heterosexual. Queerness is often used as an inclusive signifier for
lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, drag, straights who pass as gay, and any
permutation of sex/gender dissent. It is an encompassing identity that simultaneously challenges and resists the calcification of identities and categories. (p. 228)

In chapter two, I discussed the assumptions of queer theory that distinguish it from other theories of social change. Specifically, queer theorists make a number of challenges to both mainstream as well as liberation theories. First, queer theorists problematize identity categories. Queer theorists are interested in troubling traditional notions of how human beings construct their individual identities. While most of the work in queer theory has focused on gender and sexuality categories, I believe that this thinking could be extended to other sites of difference.

Second, queer theorists adamantly reject traditional hierarchies. Indeed, most theories based upon the politics of identity attempt to reject hierarchy on some level, and yet they do so by reinscribing traditional identity categories. Rather than privileging particular identities over others, queer theorists and activists argue that all human beings are have unique individual identities and, hence, the notion that one group is preferable over another is nonsense. To put this another way, queer theorists and activists explode the notion of identity so that cohesive identity categories are theoretically impossible.

Third, queer theorists and activists adamantly reject the normative assumption that sexuality is a private issue that should not be mentioned or discussed in public contexts. Indeed, theorists and activists are quick to point out that this dictate really only applies to non-normative sexual identities to begin with; traditional heterosexual relationships are frequently public. Nevertheless, queer theorists and activists contend that sexuality is a
fundamental aspect of the individual identities of all human beings, and it cannot be turned on or off at will.

Fourth, queer theory is based on the assumption that the mainstream has created a dominant worldview that the only normal kind of sexuality is heterosexuality. In fact, they argue that only particular kinds of heterosexuality are acceptable. To the extent that the mainstream has created this heteronormative assumption, countless human beings are considered aberrant. Obviously, the message that one is deviant or abnormal is not a pleasant one. Queer theorists, because they challenge stable identity categories, argue that heteronormativity is a myth because all human beings have unique identities.

Fifth, queer theorists and activists challenge essentialist identity constructions. Theorists and activists deny that collective identities are either a theoretical or a practical possibility. Instead, queer theory assumes that differences exist between all human beings, and that even within individuals, identity categories are fluid and constantly in flux. Nomaste (1996) explains that the rejection of essentialist identity categories provides a fresh, and potentially rich, site of resistance:

If heterosexuality is something which is taken for granted, and if the adoption of a homosexual identity only serves to bolster the strength of heterosexuality, then perhaps the most effective sites of resistance are those created by people who refuse both options. (p. 206)

Sixth, and finally, theorists and activists challenge the notion that the goal of social change should be to create a climate where queers are welcome to participate in an otherwise unchanged social system. In particular, queer activists contend that such an assimilationist approach relies on the idea that sexual identities are not very important,
therefore the mainstream should overlook sexual difference and accept gays and lesbians into the mainstream. Instead, queers contend that sexuality is a vital part of who every human being is, that sexual difference is significant, and that the mainstream must realize that sexual difference is much more pervasive than people like to believe. Certainly the queer movements are not the first to reject assimilation as a goal of activism. However, other movements that have rejected assimilation have relied heavily upon essentialist notions of identity in order to mobilize and create “counter” or “sub” cultures.

In the third chapter, I discuss the implications of queer theory for the study of social movements. In particular, I examine the body of literature on social movement theory from both the fields of communication and sociology. Interestingly, these bodies of literature have remained discrete for the most part. In other words, theorists in communication give little or no consideration of the social movement literature, and vice versa. I conclude that neither the communication theories of persuasion, nor the sociological theories of movement activity can adequately account for the unique take on identity that the queer movements and queer theory have introduced. Furthermore, in my discussion the queer critique, I provide examples of queer activism that cannot be adequately explained by the either the communication or sociological approaches to movements.

In particular, queer theorists would be critical of the communication approaches because they focus, for the most part on collective action with no consideration of how individual members of a movement contribute to the movement activity. Furthermore, queer theorists would reject the approach that was pervasive for many years that
movement participants are "irrational," "dysfunctional," and harmful members of society. From the perspective of queer theory, the most glaring problem with the communication approaches is that there is no consideration of how individual identities are constructed through social movement activity.

The queer critique of sociological theory, particular recent "New Social Movement" theory, centers around the dominant framework of collective identity. Theorists who take this approach contend that in order for a group to mobilize and remain cohesive, the members must cluster around a collective identity. The problem with this notion, of course, is that collective identities rely upon the notion of essentialized categories. In a sense, members of queer movements do identify with one another, but only to the extent that they recognize that they are different from the mainstream, as well as different from one another. In other words, the queer movements have constructed a collective identity based on differences rather than similarities. Obviously, this perspective of collective identity differs dramatically from the one that is presented by sociological theories of movements.

In chapter four, I discuss the implications of a queer perspective for both rhetorical practice and criticism. Specifically, I provide examples of discourse that addresses the challenges presented by queer theory. In addition, I provide an extensive analysis of the work of Pee-wee Herman/Paul Reubens. Furthermore, I discuss the potential for alternative readings of texts, and Pee-wee Herman is a strong example of this. While Herman’s programs (with one notable exception) are geared to children, they are rich in sexual innuendo and challenges of normative identity constructions.
The implications of queer theory for rhetorical criticism are significant, because more traditional approaches to rhetorical criticism do not account for the disruption of traditional identity categories. Furthermore, though, I believe that an understanding of the queer perspective is essential for those who wish to enact social change without (even unintentionally) reinscribing some assumptions of the dominant mainstream.

In the fifth chapter, I discuss the application of a queer perspective to the classroom. First, I briefly emphasize the ways in which homophobia and heterosexism are not only pervasive in our societal institutions (including our schools), but how homophobia and heterosexism are destructive to all members of society regardless of their individual sexual identities. Second, I address the implications of the traditional “banking” model of education, and the implications of such a model that disregards student/teacher experience as a valid source of knowledge. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of what a queer pedagogy might look like.

Specifically, I discuss the importance of the personal experience of both instructors and students in the classroom as both a method of learning, as well as serving to validate their identities. Specifically, I propose that we encourage our students to share “dangerous memories.” This is a challenge to the normative assumption that subjective experience has no place in learning. By encouraging such activity, we will accomplish several things. First, it demonstrates that there is more than one possible world view. Second, allowing students to speak from their own histories is empowering for individuals who have traditionally been silenced by an educational system working in the service of the normative mainstream. I also emphasize that it is not sufficient that students share
their experience, but that this experience must be open to critique. In other words, reflexivity is an essential element when such learning is taking place.

Instructors must be prepared to work with resistance. That resistance will exist should not be surprising, after all our students are indoctrinated not to talk about their lives, particularly in the classroom. Furthermore, it is likely that sharing dangerous memories will either be extremely painful, or lead to potential physical or psychic violence. It is vital that we are prepared for these possibilities.

Finally, we must encourage our students to alter reading practices to be open to diverse perspectives. This is true not only of actual reading, but in our attention to class discussion. Indeed, in order to create an environment in which students are able to understand how power is constructed, as well the assumptions upon which their own beliefs are founded, we must encourage students to seek out perspectives different from their own.

Directions for Future Research

There are numerous directions that I believe this research could take in the future. The queer perspective has broad implications for communication studies in general, and rhetorical criticism and theory in particular. Given that identity is central to our human nature, the role of identity in important to all communication processes. In this section, I outline some of the directions that I believe that future research is needed. I identify a number of specific potential research projects, as well as one larger macro issue about the implications of queer theoretical assumptions in general that should be fruitful in terms of further study.
In terms of understanding the role of identity in social movement studies, there are a couple of immediate directions that this research might take. First, the queer perspective could be used to explain not only how identities are constructed prior to social movement participation, but it should also be useful in understanding how social movement discourse functions to (re)construct individual identities of social movement participants—keeping in mind that identities are fluid and constantly in flux. Second, further research is needed in terms of explaining how the queerly reconstructed notion of collective identity (based upon differences rather than similarities of social movement participants) functions within identity movements in which the identities are ambiguous. Furthermore, and I have alluded to this in this dissertation, there are periods of queer activism that rely on the notion of “strategic essentialism.” That is, at times members of the queer movements take on traditionally essentialist labels, although they might not fit the traditional essentialized identity. This is done as a rhetorical strategy, as well as to mobilize more effectively as a group. More research is needed on the implications of such a rhetorical strategy.

In terms of rhetorical criticism, extensive application of this queer perspective should yield interesting results about how identities are constructed through discourse. Such work should help us to better understand how normative and non-normative readings of texts contribute to the fluidity of individual identities. In addition, queer criticism will help us to better understand how identities are shaped through the use of discourse. In other words, a vital question that must be asked is how does the act of communication shape/change/construct our ever-changing selves? Finally, queer criticism
should help us to further understand how normative discourses create power structures, and how normative notions about identity are constructed to oppress individuals who are different.

Additional research is also needed on the role of identity in classrooms. In the fifth chapter, I proposed specific strategies for implementing queer pedagogy. For the most part, I had college and university students in mind. Obviously, identity differences are an issue from the time that children first enter elementary school (or even pre-school). When children are taught that difference is to be avoided at all cost, and that only particular identities are acceptable, many of them receive the message very early in their lives that there is something inherently wrong with them. We must begin to celebrate difference in our educational institutions from the time that our students enter school. Obviously, college students and students in grades K-12 have different levels of sophistication, and dealing with difference of any kind must be approached with a particular group in mind. More work is needed in terms of how we should approach difference with non-college students.

Furthermore, my discussion of queer pedagogy was quite specific in terms of strategies for courses in the humanities and social sciences. While queer pedagogy is more obviously applicable to these areas, there needs to be some exploration of how such a perspective would be useful in the “hard” sciences. While personal experience is less likely to be emphasized in scientific courses, there are obvious questions that need to be raised in terms of objectivity-subjectivity, the scientific method, dominant constructions of scientific thinking (as well as considerations of who is doing that thinking), etc. Many
feminists, for example, have argued that science has been constructed from a masculine perspective. A consideration of queer theory in scientific thinking will help us to build upon our understanding of the power structures that undergird the scientific enterprise.

Finally, I believe that one of the largest gaps in queer theory is that few theorists seriously consider the application of queer principles to sites of difference other than sexuality and gender. In fact, I think that these principles can be useful in helping us to better understand how any site of difference is constructed. To the extent that any marginalized groups mobilize around a collective identity—based upon race, class, gender, sexuality, physical (dis)abilities, age, etc.—the queer perspective can help us to understand why such identity constructions are problematic, how they reinscribe the normative assumptions of the mainstream, and how they further marginalize particular individuals.

Summary

Queer theory, and the queer movements, have provided scholars and activists with a rich perspective of social change. Queer theorists and activists provide a perspective that accounts for differences that are not accounted for in our earlier theories. To be sure, queer theory and activism are not without problems. Indeed, the rejection of essentialist notions of identity has not only been a strength of theory and practice, but it has also been a weakness. The practical result of the critique on essentialism is that groups have had a difficult time surviving. Nevertheless, such an approach to difference is far more inclusive than other strategies. Furthermore, because essential identities are a myth, queer theory provides a more realistic view individual identities.
Finally, queer theory and activism might appear to reject other cultures altogether. This is not necessarily the case. As I explained in chapter three, there are times when queers might choose to participate in traditional gay/lesbian culture. The critical issue, however, is that we must recognize that these cultures are not the homogeneous entities that we once believed. They are comprised of individuals with widely varying, and constantly changing, identities. Irvine explains that queer theory and poststructuralism have not necessarily eliminated earlier ideas about culture, but have enlarged and decentered them. . . . Dimensions of culture, whether values, shared language, or slang, geography, or symbolic systems, are not universal, deterministic, or static. Cultural artifacts, subjectivities, and identities are more fragmented and divided. These theories call into question the nature and meaning of all cultural groups by challenging the authenticity of any one culture, by suggesting that the meaning of culture will vary historically and contextually, and by observing that cultural identifications are multiple and overlapping. (pp. 226-227)
References


Cunningham, M. (1992, May/June). If you're queer and you're not angry in 1992, you're not paying attention; if you're straight it may be hard to figure out what all the shouting's about. *Mother Jones*, 60-68.


