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Video Killed the Drag Star: Identity Presentation, Language, and Queer Habitus

Hayley Neiling

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Hayley Neiling entitled Video Killed the Drag Star: Identity Presentation, Language, and Queer Habitus.

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

Devon Ralston, Thesis Adviser

Dustin M. Hoffman, Committee Member

Siobahn Craft Brownson, Committee Member

Takita Sumter, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Jack E. DeRochi, Dean, Graduate School

VIDEO KILLED THE DRAG STAR: IDENTITY PRESENTATION, LANGUAGE,
AND QUEER HABITUS

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty
Of the
College of Arts and Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment
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Requirements for the Degree
Of
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By
Hayley Neiling

Abstract

Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as “the ability to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted” (170). In other words, habitus is the combination of our habits, perceptions, and presentations that are formed from the ingrained ideas of our society. Our habitus is both performed and perceived, and in this way, we gain cultural capital, which is the curating of knowledge, skills, and behaviors which demonstrate our value. Habitus is deeply affected by our position in society, particularly class. However, habitus can be applied to other cultural markers such as race and sexuality. I posit that, if one’s habitus can be formed from mainstream culture, then it stands to reason that another’s habitus can be formed around counter-culture, and it would be a much more intentional formation of identity. The Queer community has inherently formed its identity around the destruction of dominant social constructs. The idea of a “queer habitus” formed as an expression of protest in itself turns habitus on its head. Habitus is formed as a way to gain cultural capital and therefore upholds social systems of oppression. However, if queer habitus is formed around the inherent desire to deconstruct these social systems of oppression, then habitus in itself becomes a form of protest rather than conformity. With this in mind, my research question for this thesis is how do language, performance, and identity interact to form queer habitus in a community inherently based in protest?

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Queer Habitus

The queer identity has always been centered around disruption. Queerness has never been quiet or polite. It has never existed for the consumption of the masses. Inherently, queerness has always served to subvert and dismantle dominant cultural ideals about gender, sexuality, and conformity. Queer people have always had to fight for rights, for representation, and for safety, and because of this, queer identities are formed in the context of fighting for the right to exist. Protest in itself is disruption. In physical settings, protest disrupts physical spaces in order to gain the attention of those in power. In more personal ways, in an attempt to overturn dominant systems of power, we disrupt normative ideas about gender and sexuality through subversive acts of presentation and language. Any act that disrupts the norms of the dominant culture can be considered an act of protest. Much of the queer community has formed values and identity performances surrounding the disruption of dominant systems of power.

Throughout this project, I will be using the word “queer” to refer to the LGBTQIA+ community. While the word “queer” has a complicated and often violent history of usage in relation to this community, I choose to use it because it has been reclaimed by a majority of the community to mean something much more inclusive than even the string of letters which attempts to include all identities. The issue with “LGBTQIA+” is that it must always be shortened, and while the “+” implies the inclusion of more identities, these “+” identities are inherently erased and forgotten. “Queer” on the other hand is a simple and effective word that encompasses all identities which cannot be defined by heteronormative and cisnormative identities. Additionally,

the history of the usage of “queer” reflects the larger question that this project attempts to answer.

Brief History of “Queer”

Before the word “queer” was used to mean anything outside of the dominant norms, “queer” was used as far back as the sixteenth-century in English-speaking countries to mean strange or irregular (Tamanna). “Queer” was not used as a slur for homosexuality until 1894 when it was used in a letter written by John Sholto Dougless to slander Oscar Wilde (Tamanna). In the 1950s and 60s young people in London who referred to themselves as queer to communicate same-sex attraction signaled that they were deviant. Uses of the word queer in the 1950s and 60s came with the connotation of deviance, perversion, and worthlessness (Weeks 144). “Queer” was used to degrade those who experienced same-sex attraction and further stigmatize and inspire violence against queer people. The use of the word queer in positive relation to the queer community picked up in the United States in the late 1980s around the time of the AIDS crisis. This usage of the word queer was adopted in order to bring attention to the queer population that was being neglected in light of a fatal disease. People felt alienated and abandoned by the government, and so adopted the word queer to confront stigmatization and inspire radicalism (Weeks 144). In this way, “queer” became associated with social and political subversion. More recently, shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer as Folk* have helped to normalize the use of “queer” as an identity. Queer is now used by some as an identifying label. It signifies the fluidity of and indefinable nature of both sexuality and gender. Today, queer seems to straddle these meanings while asserting this new usage as an identifier. In Louis Althusser’s *On the*

Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses he suggests that, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing” (40). In dominant ideology there is no world or identity by which a queer person may be hailed or interpellated. Althusser further theorizes, “individuals are always-already subjects. Hence individuals are ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects which they always already are.” (41). At birth, people are interpellated into the dominant culture. They are given a gender, a name that coincides with that gender, and a sexuality that is deemed acceptable by this ideology. This interpellation into dominant culture comes with expectations to follow gender and sexuality norms. Queer people, who often find that this heteronormative and cisnormative interpellation is restrictive, must resist that interpellation upon realizing that dominant interpellation is not appropriate for their identity. The reclaiming of the word “queer” allows for individuals to then be interpellated into a culture other than the dominant one. It allows for individuals to be hailed as a member of a culture and become part of a community in which interpellation feels less restrictive in terms of gender and sexual identity. Many people still associate the word with the violence and stigmatization of the 1950s and 60s, while others recognize its subversive role in both politics and language. Those who use the term queer must be aware of these histories and usages in order to fully embrace queerness and the histories that created queer counter-culture. In making these choices to participate, whether to be called a certain term like “queer,” or to practice queer habitus, means to

embrace certain ideologies and resist others. Part of this awareness is an understanding of interpellation and that in making these choices, one is always already interpellated.

Queer Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as “the ability to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted” (170). In other words, habitus is the combination of our habits, perceptions, and presentations that are formed from the ingrained ideas of our society. Our habitus is both performed and perceived, and in this way, we gain cultural capital, which is the curating of knowledge, skills, and behaviors which demonstrate our value. Habitus is deeply affected by our position in society, particularly class. However, habitus can be applied to other cultural markers such as race and sexuality. I posit that, if one’s habitus can be formed from mainstream culture, then it stands to reason that another’s habitus can be formed around counter-culture. Bourdieu’s theory is that the curation of taste is inherent rather than conscious. A habitus formed around a counter-culture, however, would complicate this in that much of these curations of taste would involve the conscious decision to subvert the dominant culture. The queer community has inherently formed its identity around the destruction of dominant social constructs in both the spirit of protest as well as a resistance to interpellation. The idea of a “queer habitus” formed as an expression of protest in itself turns habitus on its head. Habitus is formed as a way to gain cultural capital and therefore upholds social systems of oppression. However, if queer habitus is formed around the inherent desire to deconstruct these social systems of oppression, then habitus in itself becomes a form of protest rather than conformity.

Language, performance, and identity interact to form queer habitus in a community inherently based in protest. Furthermore, queer identities are comfortable sitting in unresolved tension. The tension between the unconscious formation of taste cultivated by capitalism and the conscious formation of taste that goes against cultural norms and resists interpellation is one that I will be grappling with throughout this research. Scholars argue over whether these formations of taste are intentional or not; however, in reality, it is not so simple as to have one correct answer. Inherently, both of these assertions are correct while still being in tension with one another. It is in the intersection of tension that the queer identity exists. It is this unresolved tension that creates the most disruption for the dominant culture, because while unresolved tension is uncomfortable, tension and discomfort have been ingrained into queerness. For me, this research is deeply personal in that it is both the deconstruction of the formation of my own identity and the culture in which I participate daily.

Review of Literature

While ideologies about Bourdieu's habitus and taste can be found easily, discussion specifically about a queer habitus are hard to come by. In "The Queering of Bourdieu: Analysis of LGBT Subcultural Production Through the Lens of Pierre Bourdieu," Sheri Manuel addresses queer habitus as the opposite of what I am arguing. She claims that queer habitus actually reinforces the dominant culture rather than forming from a counter-culture. Her concept is that in examining queer culture through a Bourdieuan lens, it is found that the dominant culture is recreated in queer subculture

through capital creation and reproduction of power¹ (9). Kathrine Sender's "Gay Readers, Consumers, and a Dominant Gay Habitus: 25 Years of the Advocate Magazine," uses Bourdieu's theory of habitus and taste to examine appeals to gay consumers. She examines the magazine *The Advocate*'s role in the formation of a queer habitus and the creation of a visible queer working class. Sender, however, discusses concepts that formed this "gay habitus," some of which do directly oppose the ideals of the dominant culture (74). Conversely, in "Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus," Alison Rooke addresses the ways in which Bourdieu neglects to include gender and race's intersections with class and how these affect habitus. She applies Bourdieu's theories to the ways queer women experience oppression from the dominant heteronormative culture (232). In Paul Julian Smith's "Back to Front: Alberto Cardín's Queer Habitus," he takes a very different direction and applies Bourdieu's habitus to queer Spanish literature, namely the work of Alberto Cardín. Smith Discusses how the dominant habitus rendered Cardín's work all but invisible. He also argues the Cardín creates a sort of queer habitus in Spain among queer intellectuals (474). Finally, in *Shock Value*, John Waters looks at "bad taste" and its link to queer culture and performativity. While his theory of taste does not explicitly refer to Bourdieu, the connection is clear. Waters very clearly alludes to a taste cultivated by a counter-culture, which purposefully subverts dominant ideas of what is tasteful (20). Here, we see an example of the way queer taste and habitus resist interpellation by the dominant culture.

¹Manuel is correct, however, in her assertion that queer culture is affected by capitalism. In chapter four, I address similar ideas of queer culture being coopted and made palatable for the dominant culture by capitalism.

In order to define queer habitus as centering around protest, it becomes important to look at sources conflating queer identity with protest. Judith Butler does this in *Gender Trouble* when she claims that queer identity is fundamentally disaligned with identifications of the dominant culture. She states that differentiations in gender and sexuality are not accounted for in dominant identifications and are therefore subversive. She also references the power gained through these subversive identities (127). In a more specific example, Alison Rooke looks at the way queer women interact with heteronormativity and how queer expressions in women prevent them from feeling a sense of belonging in the dominant culture. According to Rooke, because of these queer expressions in women, they find this sense of belonging in counter-culture (232). These assertions of identity in the dominant culture then become subversive. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz discusses the process of creating one's own identity and performance outside of the dominant culture's expectations. He analyzes the intersections of queerness with race and the complexities that these ideas spawn in relation to identity. He defines "disidentifying" as the identification with subjects or objects that are not typically coded for individuals of certain identities, such as..., to identify with in the dominant culture. He also states that this disidentification is not inherently purposeful (13). Muñoz's theory is much less conscious than what Rooke is talking about. This is where the tension between the conscious and unconscious formations of taste begins to show. While Rooke discusses the conscious cultivation of queer expressions in order to find belonging, Muñoz addresses the unconscious identification with inherently queer representations. It seems that queerness holds conscious and unconscious cultivations of taste in tension with one

another. Queer habitus happens in the navigation of this conscious and unconsciousness in the creation of a queer identity.

Additionally, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam discusses failure. He addresses failure as a “weapon of the weak” and a refusal to adhere to the expectations of the dominant culture. This failure is a kind of resistance. He goes on to define queerness as this type of “failure” which disrupts dominant social norms. He states that queer identity subverts cultural expectation. In this sense, queerness is protest (88). Finally, in “Emerging Genders: Semiotic Agency and the Performance of Gender Among Genderqueer Individuals,” Anna I. Corwin looks at gender identities that lie outside of the male/female binary. She explores the way in which non-binary people speak about and present their identities when introducing them to people unfamiliar with the concept. She examines how these explanations and performances of identity both uphold and disrupt dominant ideas about the gender binary, revealing the tension between the conscious and unconscious cultivation of taste and assertion of identity (255). While Halberstam implies a more unconscious cultivation with his theory of failure as protest, Corwin looks at the more intentional performances of transgender and non-binary individuals in the form of the language and presentations they choose to use to embody their identities. In chapters two and three, I address both of these theories to look at the way protest interacts with queer embodiment. Halberstam’s theory of failure as protest interacts with embodied identities by pointing out the ways in which queer embodiment fails to meet the expectations of dominant ideologies.

Discussions about queer embodiment become essential in the deeply personal direction queer protest has moved. Judith Butler talks about embodiment in terms of

gender and sexuality as “subversive bodily acts.” She builds on Foucault’s ideas of a “sexed” body and expands it to queer bodies and motherhood. In this way, queer bodies are no longer defined in the accepted way of the dominant culture (125). She also examines physical bodies in relation to gender as a social construct. She argues that gender is not so easily defined by physical features, and bodies that exhibit diversions from the norm are inherently subversive. Butler also argues that gender is performed and is not inherent but rather shaped by social norms (150). In *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, Jack Halberstam specifically addresses transgender bodies and the performance and embodiment of transgender identities. He does this through looking at gender reassignment surgery. He also discusses the idea that a wide array of different types of bodies fall under the umbrella of “trans*,” and therefore the embodiment and performance of a transgender identity is complicated and often messy (22). José Esteban Muñoz focuses his analysis of performance and embodiment on queer people of color who, Muñoz states, have been placed outside of white normativity by their race, sexuality, and gender performativity. He examines performance art of queer people of color and how these performances are visible embodiments of queer identities. He argues that art created by queer artists of color will always be political as long as the dominant culture remains the same (161).

Additionally, in “Notes on ‘Camp,’” Susan Sontag addresses taste in its relation to camp. In this way. In relating camp to queer identities, she does attribute genderless and androgynous bodies as being a key element of camp. She talks about camp as the exaggeration of character and how this has been attributed to homosexuality as well as the success and further development of camp; However, she is also sure to clarify that

camp goes beyond homosexual taste (273). Furthermore, in “Constructing the Queer “I”:
Performativity, Citationality, and Desire in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*,” David
Weiss looks at the original television show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and argues
against accusations of upholding stereotypes by examining queer performativity on the
show. He examines the embodiment of gay identities and how these are performed
through fashion, posture, and speech on the show (23). Veronika Koller writes about
lesbian performance in “Butch camp: On the Discursive Construction of a Queer Identity
Position.” She addresses the work of Lorna Gulston and the idea that lesbian identity is
formed and performed through a combination of “butchness” and “camp” which is
usually associated with gay men and drag. In this way she analyzes how female queer
identities are performed and embodied (249). The embodiment of femininity in both
queer men and women shows both the intentional and unintentional disruption of cultural
norms by glorifying, performing, and identifying with an expression that has typically
been considered inferior. Finally, Anna I. Corwin examines embodied queer identities
and semiotics. She looks at the semiotic displays of gender by non-binary people such as
clothing, gestures, and linguistics. She claims that these embodied signs both uphold and
challenge the dominant culture’s view of gender norms (261).

In this same way, it is impossible to discuss queer performance without also
addressing perception. In *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick looks
at gender roles and the performativity of gender and sexuality in western literature.
Specifically, she analyzes the male body and how it is written about by other men.
Similarly, she explores the perception of the male body in homosexual and homosocial
ways (82). Additionally, Shon Faye in “To be real: On Trans Aesthetics and

Authenticity,” explores drag and transgender presentations. She states that drag has the luxury of being campy and unconvincing while transgender people feel the pressure to “pass” as a binary much more heavily. Being perceived outside of the gender binary or as gender non-conforming can often be dangerous for transgender people. She also addresses how in the media, this reality of danger that comes with being visibly transgender is often erased in the media. John Waters also discusses the perception of drag queens. Throughout *Shock Value*, he often returns to the examples of drag queens, specifically Harris Glenn Milstead, known for his stage persona, Divine, to exemplify his surrounding “bad” taste. Drag queens go directly against social norms surrounding beauty and femininity, and therefore they represent Waters’ idea of “bad” taste perfectly (34). This idea of “bad” taste is important in this context because it shows an intentional rejection of taste cultivated by the dominant culture. It is a representation of the conscious choice to reject what the dominant culture considers to be valuable. In Susan Sontag’s analysis of camp, she looks at camp as being a product of the realization of the difference between good taste and bad taste.² The perception and cultivation of this bad taste that happens in camp results in the rejection of seriousness. Camp is not to be taken seriously, and therefore, through camp, perceptions of taste become complicated (271).

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger discusses perception, specifically as it relates to art and images of people. Berger addresses the ways in which we perceive the objects and images around us. These perceptions are influenced by what we know and believe.

Assumptions that we make about people based on their appearance come from what

² In this way, if awareness of taste is a requirement of camp, camp becomes a rejection of the unconscious cultivation of taste which is inherently linked to class. This again is an act of disruption and subversion.

ingrained social norms we have been taught (48). Similarly, David Weiss talks about the perception of queerness on television. His argument is built upon arguing against the perception of stereotypes that *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* received so much criticism for. He attempts to refute the idea that these stereotypes are being upheld by the identity performances of the “fab five.” He also explores this queerness and its perception by straight cisgendered people and how the performances of both gender and sexuality by the “fab five” disrupt dominant notions of sexual and gender binaries (92). In disrupting these binaries publicly on television the “fab five” become visible examples of embodied queer identity to both the dominant and queer cultures. This visibility of embodiment is an example of deeply the personal protest which I will discuss in chapter three.

The language of the queer community has been an important central hub around which queer counter-culture revolves. Judith Butler analyzes the binary language of the dominant culture that reinforces heteronormative and heterosexist systems of thought. She asserts that using language to combat and dismantle these systems of thought by using language that is more descriptive and inclusive of queer identities is an act of subversion. Jack Halberstam discusses the language of being transgender. Specifically, he looks at historical categorizations and classifications of transgender bodies and the practice of naming and un-naming (“Trans*” ix). David Weiss writes about “gay language” and “gay language research” and how what is often considered “gay language” can be stereotypical and reductive. He also asserts that the idea of “gay language” can often conflate sexuality and gender, which dangerously erases the important difference between the two. Weiss also examines the way language is used in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* to express desire and encode personalities as masculine or feminine (88). In

“The approach that dares speak its name: queer and the problem of 'big nouns' in the language of academia,” Federico Giulio Sicurella discusses queer theory in academia. He specifically addresses the use of the word “queer” in the title of queer theory and how this affects its usage both in and outside of academia. He examines the risk of institutionalizing the word and its position as a “big noun.” He also analyzes the way the word queer resists a stable definition, similar to the way being queer also resists stable definition (80). Queer people’s use and creation of language harkens back to Althusser’s interpellation. In creating language that fits queer identities and culture, queer people once again resist being interpellated into the dominant culture.

In “Intersectionality, Language and Queer Lives,” John Gray and Melanie Cook trace the epistemology of “intersectionality,” and cite issues with its methodology. According to them the word “intersectionality” itself is too vague, and it is unclear whether it refers to understanding individual experiences, theorizing identity, or “whether it should be taken as a property of social structures and cultural discourses” (405). This struggles to encompass the complexity of human social experiences. Holly R. Cashman also addresses intersectionality in “Narrating the Intersection: Body, Time, Space and Transition in One Queer Life.” Cashman follows the life of a Mexican-American transgender woman named Susana. She interviews Susana and discusses her intersectional identity and how this affects her performance and language usage, specifically in the context of her transition (416). This examination of a specific individual provides a real life example of how embodied performances and language are part of the queer habitus and exist as a means of interpellation into queer counter-culture.

Additionally, in “Butch Camp: On the Discursive Construction of a Queer Identity Position,” Veronika Koller looks at the relationship between language, gender, and sexuality. She specifically focuses on facets of lesbian identity and the words “butch” and “femme” which have very specific linguistic meanings and histories as related to the lesbian identity. In “Language, sexuality and place: The view from cyberspace,” Brian W. King discusses the language of queer chat rooms and online spaces. He looks at the way language is used in these online spaces to perform identities without embodying them. He also analyzes how the use of language demonstrates certain social understandings in the online spaces (1). On top of these theoretical approaches, there are countless reference books, guides, and introductions to queer language and identities that set out to define the ever-growing list of labels to identify with. These dictionaries, so to speak, set out to make this language, along with the counter-culture it is attached to, accessible to both queer people and those wishing to understand. In this project specifically, I am looking at the way queer people use this language to interpellate themselves into a counter-culture. This language becomes a means of hailing through the creation of identity terms, especially on the internet.

Finally, discussions of queer spaces and their relation to identity are important to address in relation to queer habitus. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz focuses on queer people of color in spaces of performance and the way that these spaces allow for the specifically unique performances of both identity and art that queer people of color express (181). In “Navigating Embodied Lesbian Cultural Space: Toward a Lesbian Habitus,” Alison Rooke looks at queer identity in urban spaces. She describes what she calls “queer cities”

consisting of places of historical queer significance and continues queer cultural growth. She explains, “this is a call for imagining the city in a way that encompasses the lived, perceived, and conceived urban spaces and spatiality of queer lives” (233). Her research places emphasis on the importance of urban spaces in the history of social development and change in the queer community (233). This queer history that is attached to urban spaces creates a romanticizing of these urban spaces for queer people, which can prove problematic for queer people without access to these areas, and to those who seek out these spaces but find the fail to live up to this romanticization. These conceptions of safe and romantic queer urban spaces also function as queer performances built out of a desire for acceptance in a community outside of the dominant one.

In “Queer Organising and Performativity: Towards a Norm-Critical Conceptualisation of Organisational Intersectionality,” Jannick Friis Christianson looks at queerness and performativity, specifically in relation to intersectionality, in the workplace. He discusses the way this affects power structures and attempts to create workshops to combat dangerous cisnormative and heteronormative structures in the workplace (103). As mentioned above, Brian W. King addresses queerness in cyberspace. He particularly looks at how queerness is created and performed in these spaces that are not physical. He analyzes the spatial metaphor of the “room,” and how these metaphorical spaces interact with language to create spaces for the performance of non-heteronormative performances and relationships outside of the physical world (5).

While queer habitus has been explored by several scholars, none seem to set out to define how that habitus forms, which is why I posit that the language and performance of the queer identity are based on social structures formed in counter-cultural settings

which subverts the dominant culture. Similarly, queer identity and protest have been addressed and researched by countless scholars. The prevalence of this connection between queerness and protest is enough to mark it as a hallmark of queer counter-culture.

Further, queer performance and embodiment have been noted as an important mark of queer counter-culture. The way queer people perform and embody their identities is a personal curation of identifying taste. The conscious curation of queer taste is an important distinction to make when attempting to define queer habitus as it differs from the unconscious curation of taste in the dominant culture, however conscious and unconscious cultivations of taste remain in tension with one another as an essential core to queer identity. The perception of this embodiment also plays an important role in the formation of queer habitus. Many researchers such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Susan Sontag have addressed perception, both intended and inherent, of queer performances, no one has yet linked these perceptions to habitus. The role perception plays in habitus is significant in the way that it is shaped from the desire to be seen in one's most authentic form and to connect to others who are fundamentally similar. Therefore, perception inherently shapes queer taste.

Queer language has also been theorized about in many different forms. From the way the queer people communicate, speak about ourselves, define ourselves, create language, and perform through language has all been addressed from various angles. Language's connection to the formation of a queer habitus, however, seems to have been neglected. In queer culture, language is important in both the way it is used to

communicate and define identity as well as how it affects the surrounding dominant culture.

Space and its relation to queer expression, however, is a relatively open field. There do seem to be researchers starting to look at the interactions of identity and space, particularly in the way someone with an already established identity exists in a space that has not been made for them; however, I am specifically interested in the way space interacts with the formation of identity, both individually and community-wide. Historically, space has played an important role in creating safety and connection in the queer community. In more recent years, young queer people have had to cope with the lack of physical spaces specifically intended for queer expression as they seem to have declined in popularity and only exist as spaces for partying, which excludes them due to age.

Chapter Two will focus on community identity, around which queer habitus revolves. The queer community itself formed as a subversive counter-culture. It existed, typically, in the form of physical spaces where people could feel safe. Such places took the form of night clubs and bars that catered to those who did not fit a cultural norm i.e. those who did not have the cultural capital of the dominant culture. These spaces spawned community, friendship, and belonging and created a culture that existed both outside and within the dominant one. In these spaces, identities were defined, and identity performance was intended to cater to this subversive culture rather than to the dominant one, even if it was only in this one space. For example, clothes and accessories were used to indicate sexual preferences and project a specific identity of what “type” of queer person this was. Drag was, and still is, used to experiment with and subvert gender

norms. These outward performances were meant to communicate with others in the queer community. In this way, however, access to these spaces was limited to those who were near them thus community was the privilege of those who either previously lived in urban areas or had somehow made their way to these areas. Queer habitus, then, was limited to those with access. In addition, protest was public and took up space. Disruption took place in the form of groups. This again was limited to those who had access to these areas. This is less true nowadays; however, queer habitus still revolves around community. The community is now a lot more accessible because it is no longer purely physical. Similarly, the language of identity has expanded greatly simply because ideas can now be spread more quickly. However, these shifts and expansions of language still must be accepted and used by a large portion of the community to gain traction. For example, the word “queer,” which used to be used as a slur, has now been reclaimed as both an umbrella term and an identity marker. The decision to reclaim this term was not the work of one person; it was the community who had to do the work to change its meaning. There are still those in the community who express discomfort with the word; however, a majority of the community now recognizes the word as a positive one that can no longer be used to vilify. The creation of new identity terms is never just the work of one person, but rather an acceptance by the community. Some terms gain more traction than others, and this then influences the people who identify with them. In these ways, language becomes a subversive act. The reclaiming of slurs undermines the dominant culture’s ability to attack the community, and the creation and recognition of new terms is a way to subvert the dominant cultures ideas of rigid and binary identity.

Chapter Three will address personal identity and embodiment. In the way that queer habitus began in physical spaces, queer habitus and protest has evolved to accommodate our more extensive community. While the queer community still has some of these physical spaces, queer lives revolve around them much less. Subversion and disruption are less about the community as a whole and more about personal performance. Instead of creating physical spaces for ourselves, we create language to make space for ourselves in our vernacular. We disrupt the dominant language with words of our own to force recognition. The way we perform our identity is often very visible. The way we walk, dress, and sit are cited as markers of a queer identity by other queer people. This then encourages us to embody these “queer” gestures and styles. We act in ways that are recognizable to other queer people, subverting expectations to gain cultural capital outside of the dominant culture. As a form of protest, these acts have become deeply personal. We, therefore, embody disruption. Protest becomes part of our everyday identities. We exist as queer outside of the spaces where we feel safe in order to confront the dominant culture, and this confrontation in itself has become a marker of our own culture.

Chapter Four will address the ways that capitalism complicates these ideas of queer habitus and performance. The more visible we appear, both as individuals and as a community, the easier it is for corporations to then target, exploit, and profit off of queer identities. Capitalism complicates queer habitus by controlling who is visible and what version of queerness is acceptable. Queer people who gain popularity in the media are often the least disruptive in their identities. Popularizing less disruptive queer identities, makes queer identity more palatable for the dominant culture and reinforces the dominant

ideals. These identities are exploited in order to make companies appear more queer friendly. Their more palatable version of queerness can then be taken and commodified in order to profit off of the queer community. Commodification of queer identities is also an attempt to affect the queer habitus itself. By popularizing certain performances of identities which align more with the dominant culture, these performances then influence queer cultural capital and affect subsequent performances of many queer people. In this way, protest must again become deeply personal in the way that those in the community must discern for themselves what is genuine and what is a projection working for profit. Queer people, especially those whose identities are more marginalized than others such as women of color and transgender people, often must stay informed on the workings of corporations in order to choose where to put their money. Staying informed can serve as a form of protest; however, it is not a disruption but rather an understanding of the dominant system. Supporting companies with genuine interest in queer issues allows those companies to make disruptions on their levels, but one must first have trust in that company, which is hard to do in an untrustworthy system. Capitalism has also disrupted the physical spaces of the queer community. Urban areas where physical queer spaces exist are being gentrified. This means the removal of many poor queer people and even the removal of these spaces altogether. Queer spaces that are not removed are again only accessible to those who are physically close to them, those who can afford to live in such areas. All of these factors combined have created a hierarchy of representation, visibility, and access in the queer community. Those who are more visible have more power over the queer habitus; therefore, the queer habitus has become mixed up in capitalistic goals.

The purpose of this research is to look at the seemingly short and seemingly scarce history of the western queer community, and to track the formation of queer identities which are inherently based in protest. I am interested in how the history of performance, embodiment, perception, language, and space have formed together to create a queer habitus represented in the counter-culture of the queer community. While identity is never so simple as to be defined in words and is always complicated by the dominant culture and capitalism, queer identity has formed itself around something much more fluid and disruptive than what is accepted by the dominant norms. Much of this disruption comes from the willingness to sit in the tension that forms when conscious and unconscious formations of taste come into conflict with one another. The acceptance of this tension is what lies at the heart of queer disruption. This tension is not something that needs to be resolved, but rather it is something that is utilized to create disruption. In these four chapters, I explore how identity, performance, and language create a queer habitus. The queer community is fundamentally a community of individuals, and it is a community inherently and historically built on protest. This community of protest has evolved into something much more embodied, and some would argue that in doing so, has lost the core value of disruption. However, through individual identity and performance and through purposefully holding corporations accountable, the queer community can remain one of disruption, just in a more personal and nuanced way. This core of disruption can never truly be erased from queer habitus because it is where queer people find community and therefore it is at the very core of queer identity.

Chapter 2: Community Identity

The queer community itself formed as a subversive counter-culture, and it is around this subversion that queer habitus revolves. The community existed, typically, in the form of physical spaces where people could feel safe. Such places took the form of night clubs, bars, and gay villages that catered to those who did not fit a cultural norm i.e. those who did not have the cultural capital of the dominant culture. These spaces spawned community, friendship, and belonging and created a culture that existed both outside and within the dominant one. However, access to these spaces was limited to those who were near them thus, community was the privilege of those who either previously lived in urban areas or had somehow made their way to these areas. Queer habitus was limited to those with access. This is less true nowadays; however, queer habitus still revolves around community. Because of the internet, access to the community has been expanded and knowledge is more readily available. The community is now a lot more accessible; it is no longer purely physical. The physical spaces may no longer be necessary, but because of the internet there are now multiple points of access and creation for the queer community, which I will discuss more in chapter 3. This chapter focuses on the creation of queer culture, taste, and habitus within the physical spaces where the queer community formed in the United States. The expression of queer identities, formed inside queer spaces in direct opposition of the dominant habitus, and its subsequent expression outside of queer spaces in the form of protest and disruption have allowed for the creation of a larger queer community whose habitus revolves around the rejection of dominant cultural norms, which makes this habitus more conscious than Bourdieu's original concept of habitus.

Resisting heteronormativity can look different for everyone, but as a community, queer culture manifests as a culmination of individuals that in one way or another exist in opposition to the expectations of the dominant culture. Bourdieu argues that taste, “serves to justify the illusion of spontaneous generation which the cultivated disposition tends to produce by presenting itself in the guise of an innate disposition, must serve . . . in the sense of the ‘faculty of immediately and intuitively judging aesthetic values’” (99). Bourdieu’s concept of taste is a subconscious draw to what society values. The cultivation of taste, while feeling innate, is actually a reflection of one’s status in the social hierarchy. Queer taste, since it is cultivated from a counter-culture formed around resisting the dominant culture, pushes at the edges of binaries by existing in ways that the dominant culture condemns, and these shared experiences of both subtle and overt resistance, in order to authentically express oneself, are what make up queer culture. It is in this way that queer taste is more conscious than Bourdieu’s original theory. In order to cultivate queer taste, one must seek out and participate in queer culture. Experiences such as coming out stories, reading into the codedness of rhetoric and representation, awareness of how others may see public displays of affection, awareness of one’s body in public spaces, earrings, tacky shirts, Vans, and shopping at Ikea are all examples of actions and embodiments that, while many still exist as part of the dominant culture, have been claimed as a queer experience and have become recognizable to other queer people as cultural markers.³ Queer culture is the tension between the safety of authentic expression in primarily queer spaces and the disruption of protest in dominant spaces in

³ Many of these markers have been claimed through online spaces. I will discuss queer aesthetics and how they become recognizable more in chapter three.

order create spaces for ourselves within the dominant culture. It is these expressions and these tensions that make up queer culture.

Brief History of Queer Spaces in the US

In the 1960s in the United States, people were rebelling against traditional and conservative ideas about sex and sexuality since ideas about homosexuality and gender nonconformity were generally that they were evil and immoral. Despite these perceptions, and because of a cultural shift away from traditional norms, queer people began to come together in spaces where they were allowed to fully express their identities. These spaces popped up primarily in cities as places for queer people to gather and live: “The notion of ‘gay pride’ not only spawned separatist enclaves—urban gay ghettos, rural lesbian feminist homesteads, Radical Faerie retreats, and the like—but also came to permit more generic membership in an assertive perceived community united primarily by sexual imperatives at odds with the heterosexual norm” (“Gay” 982). These separatist queer communities allowed people to interact and build relationships with each other and begin to form a culture. Celebration of diversity and individuality were the strengths of these spaces. From these communities spawned spaces and ideas of sexual diversity and subversive performance. In these queer gathering spaces, ideas of gender performativity and subversion began to arise in the form of drag. At Drag Balls, performers embodied gender roles outside of those prescribed by the dominant society:

As gay ghettos developed in areas such as New York’s Greenwich Village and LeftBank Paris, social activities that had previously been the realm of mainstream society changed to conform with a growing sense of cohesive identity. The masked balls that had provided an opportunity for overt cross-dressing and gender

role reversal outside of theatrical settings became homosexual-sponsored drag balls. (“Drag” 409)

These drag performances display the height of queer cultural embodiment. In these spaces where subversive gender performances became celebrated and hailed as an art, queer culture found a mode of expression. Similarly, queer people recognized their own disenfranchisement and came together in these spaces to serve and empower each other: “Since 1970... the community services center movement was inspired by early activists’ realization that a homophobic culture had produced a gay population with human services needs. Early centers were formed to promote the social and cultural development of local communities and to heal the wounds of individual community members” (“Community” 331). These community centers formed in order to help the queer community overcome rejection and oppression while also promoting the development of the queer community itself. These physical gathering spaces are where queer culture formed and evolved. These spaces are where queer taste and habitus starts to shape the identities of those existing within queer counter-culture.

Expression in Queer Spaces

In these spaces, queer people were able to experiment with an embodied identity which directly contrasted with the expectations of the dominant culture. Identities were defined, and identity performance was intended to cater to this subversive culture rather than to the dominant one, even if it was only in this one space. Bourdieu talks about the interactions between space and the individuals who occupy it saying, “The most crucial thing to note is that the question of this space is raised within the space itself—that the agents have points of view on this objective space which depends on their position within

it and in which their will to transform or conserve it is often expressed” (167). In other words, the point of view a person has on a space is directly related to their position within it. When the space becomes a place of gathering for those whose identities are rejected by the dominant culture, their position in that space shifts from their position in the dominant culture. They are no longer a social outcast with little social capital, nor do they have to compromise authentic expression in order to gain social capital and safety in the dominant culture. In spaces that act as gathering spots for those the dominant culture has rejected, a new counter-culture is formed and new forms of social capital emerge, which allows for experimentation and rejection of traditional gender roles, mainstream fashion, and capitalist influence. José Esteban Muñoz explains, “These identities-in-difference emerge from a failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Their emergence is predicated on their ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through disidentification, contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere” (7). These new expressions of identity can evolve into the social capital of queer counter-culture. By rejecting the norms of the dominant culture with clothing, hair styles, body modification, body language, etc. queer people use their bodies to find new ways to express their gender and sexuality as well as political ideology.

These gathering spaces allowed for this physical embodiment of queerness. Judith Butler writes, “[t]his ‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body. Any theory of the cultural constructed body, however, ought to question ‘the body’ as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and prior to discourse” (176). Here, Butler talks about the body as a cultural construct; the way bodies are seen and presented is a direct

effect of the dominant culture. In spaces where queer counter-culture overrides the dominant culture, queer bodies, though still influenced by the mainstream ideology of the dominant culture regarding bodies and body image, begin to dismantle rigid binary ideas about gender and presentation. While many of the physical spaces where the queer community gathered to create its own culture no longer exist, their influence still echoes into the present. Alison Rooke writes, “Urban lesbian and gay identities and their more spectacular material and spatial expressions . . . can be found in temporary moments of celebration such as annual pride parades and in the urban spaces that have been reinvented as lesbian and gay ‘cultural quarters’ or ‘villages’” (233). Queer expression seems to be at its most spectacular in spaces that are still reserved for mostly queer people. This implies that in physical spaces where queer people gather, cultural capital comes in the form of subversive bodily expression. Embodied queer expression becomes celebrated as good taste, and people are encouraged to show their queerness in the biggest and most visible ways possible.

One particular example of this subversive embodiment is drag. In these spaces of queer gathering, drag came about as a performative rejection of gender norms in the dominant culture. José Esteban Muñoz discusses disidentification as a means of resisting limiting ideologies of the dominant culture. He writes,

The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus . . . it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered

politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (31)

By performing femininity and womanhood, drag queens reconstruct the encoded message of what the dominant culture requires of women. The over-performance of femininity subverts the idea of what it means to be a woman and what it means to be feminine. Further, drag begins to deconstruct dominant cultural understanding of gender and gender performance in general. In drag, gender performance is no longer tied to notions of sex. In doing this, drag takes the messages of the dominant culture and recontextualizes them to empower queer identities. Drag queens, who in the dominant culture would be mocked, outcast, and even attacked, are uplifted for their subversive performances in queer spaces. Here, the rejection of gender norms is celebrated rather than admonished. Muñoz further explains, “The phobic object, through a campy over-the-top performance, is reconfigured as sexy and glamorous, and not as the pathetic and abject spectacle that it appears to be in the dominant eyes of heteronormative culture” (3). In spaces where the dominant culture dictates norms, rejection of these norms is not only looked down on, but violently rejected; however, in spaces of queer gathering, performances that subvert the social expectations of the dominant culture are celebrated and become a means of gaining cultural capital. It is in this way that queer habitus forms around this counter-culture that exists, in part, to dismantle restricting binaries of the dominant culture. Camp, for example, is celebrated as a major component to drag. Susan Sontag illustrates, “Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman.’ To perceive Camp in object and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theatre” (4).

Drag understands the performativity of femininity and the social construction of gender. It exaggerates these performances to their furthest extent in order to parody them. Drag queens are not meant to look like “real women,” but instead intend to parody and heighten femininity itself. By the rules of the dominant culture that link femininity to womanhood, drag queens perform the roles of women more significantly than many cisgendered women do through over-the-top presentations of femininity through make-up and clothing.

This parodying of gender performance is still linked to the dominant culture, and, in some ways, reifies the ideas of femininity and womanhood. However, historically, the parodic nature of drag allows viewers to question what femininity really is and what it represents. Butler explains, “Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself” (188). When the gender roles of the dominant culture are parodied and recontextualized by drag and other identity performances in these spaces, the culture that is created is one that is in direct opposition to the dominant culture. These performances are then co-opted by those in these spaces who begin to use their spoken language and body language, as well as their sense of fashion and subversive intentions. When these performances are celebrated, encouraged, and replicated in these spaces of gathering, then they become considered good taste within queer counter-culture. When these expressions are celebrated, queer people begin to make the conscious choice to embody them. These embodiments give them positive attention and help to form connections with

other queer people in the space. These replicated expressions serve as a form of social capital, and the conscious and unconscious choices to use them manifest as queer taste. Queer taste directly opposes the taste of the dominant culture as it is created out of an intentional critique of dominant norms. Replicating these performances, often with the understanding of where these performances began, creates a culture and community that is built upon rejecting the norms of the dominant culture. Furthermore, those who engage in these performances are lauded for their taste and often held up as valued members of the queer community.

Additionally, in these spaces, queer expression also served to communicate with other queer people. The outwardly visible appearance of the body allows for the expression of queer tendencies and interests. Bourdieu discusses physical presentation as a means of communicating class and taste to observers writing, “deliberate modifications of appearance, especially by the use of the set of marks—cosmetic (hairstyle, make-up, beard, moustache, whiskers etc.) or vestimentary—which... function as social markers deriving their meaning and value from their position in the system of distinctive signs which they constitute and which is itself homologous with the system of social positions” (192). Clothes, make-up, and hairstyles, are all signifiers of one’s position in society. Bourdieu is specifically referring to these as class markers; however, this same idea can be applied to the queer community taking up residence in the bars, clubs, and villages where it was formed which fostered the creation of outward queer expression. Again,

drag is the most visible and most extreme of these outward presentations; however, many of these outward indicators were much more subtle. Outward appearances, whether extravagant or subtle began to serve as indicators of queerness, the most subtle of which only queer people themselves could decipher. These outward presentations would often serve as a code of communication among queer people. In his 1977 series of photographs *Gay Semiotics*, Hal Fischer showcases some of the more subtle embodiments of queerness that were used among gay men in the 1970s in the

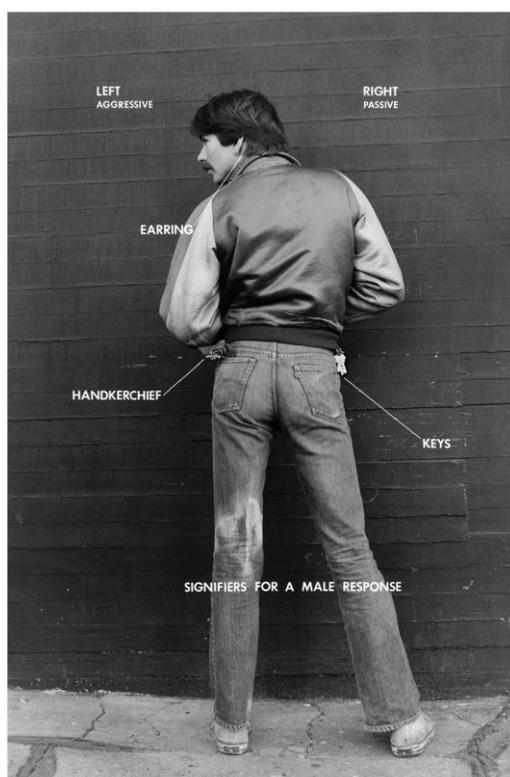


Fig. 1. Text: (top to bottom) Left Aggressive, Right Passive, Earring, Handkerchief, Keys, Signifiers for a male response; Fischer, Hal. *Signifiers for a Male Response*. 1977. *Gay Semiotics*, <https://www.gaysemiotics.com/gay-semiotics>.

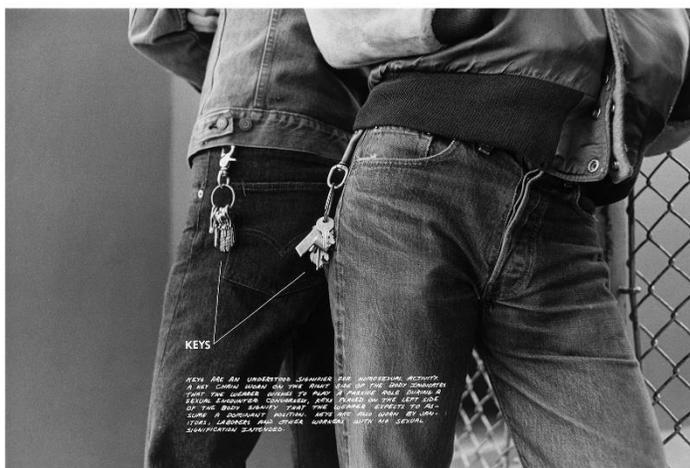
Castro and Haight-Ashbury districts, which functioned as gay villages, to communicate their queerness and sexual preferences. This system of codes was incredibly detailed and specific with different meanings based on color and which side of the body an item was placed on (see fig. 1). Through photographs of these signs overlaid with text outlining the signified meaning in queer counter-culture, these images showcase the elaborate system of codes developed among queer people to communicate with one another.

The gathering of queer people in queer centered spaces allowed for the creation of these codes which could function both inside of these spaces as well as outside of them. This is so important because there is real physical danger in misreading these codes. In the text of these photographs, Fischer includes both the encoded meaning of the objects and placement, as well as their original use in the dominant culture (see fig. 2). In a photograph entitled “Keys,” Fischer notes how the positioning of a ring of keys on either the left or right side of the belt may suggest dominance or submission in sexual preferences. He then goes on to explain that key rings are also worn by janitors and other blue collar workers (see fig.



Fig. 2. Text: Blue handkerchief: handkerchiefs signify behavioral tendencies through both color and placement. A blue handkerchief placed in the right hip pocket serves notice that the wearer desires to play the passive role during sexual intercourse. Conversely, a blue handkerchief placed in the left hip pocket indicates the wearer will assume the active or traditional male role during sexual contact. The blue handkerchief is commonly used in the treatment of nasal congestion and in some cases holds no meaning in regard to sexual preferences. Red handkerchief: red handkerchiefs are used as signifiers for behavior that is often regarded as deviant or abnormal. A red handkerchief indicates that the wearer takes the passive role in anal/hand insertion. A red handkerchief placed in the left hip pocket suggests that the wearer plays the active role in anal/hand insertion. Red handkerchiefs are also employed in the treatment of nasal discharge and in some cases may have no significance in regard to sexual contact; Fischer, Hal. *Handkerchiefs*. 1977. *Gay Semiotics*, <https://www.gaysemiotics.com/gay-semiotics>.

3). This illustrates how these embodiments are perceived both by queer counter-culture as well as the heteronormative dominant culture. By including how these



signs would be interpreted by the dominant culture, Fischer alludes to the necessity of subtly when moving around in the dominant culture. Visible queer symbols for the

purpose of communication and signification were not new to queer culture in the 1970s, nor were they unique to gay villages in the San Francisco. In Victorian England, green carnations were associated with male homosexuality while violets were associated with lesbianism (Haggerty 514). While the dominant culture violently rejected homosexuality, these subtle signs allowed queer people to communicate with one another in a way that was invisible to the dominant culture.

These communications and performances recontextualize the body in ways now significant in queer counter-culture. Butler explains, “The construction of stable bodily contours relied upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability. Those

Fig. 3. Text: Keys: keys are an understood signifier for homosexual activity. A key chain worn on the right side of the body indicates that the wearer wishes to play a passive role during a sexual encounter. Conversely, keys placed on the left side of the body signify that the wearer expects to assume a dominant position. Keys are also worn by janitors, laborers and other workers with no sexual signification intended; Fischer, Hal. *Keys*. 1977. *Gay Semiotics*, <https://www.gaysemiotics.com/gay-semiotics>.

sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines” (180). Within the queer community, the body becomes redefined in terms of sexuality and presentation. Queer sexuality and presentation are no longer limited to the strict binaries of the heteronormative dominant culture because in queer counter-culture, taste becomes separate from the taste of the dominant culture. The outward expression of queer taste can allow queer people to communicate and socialize with one another, even outside of the physical boundaries of queer spaces⁴.

Community and Protest: Visibility Outside of Queer Spaces

Social rejection from the dominant culture leads to the need for a sense of community and subsequently the creation of queer counter-culture. Queer identities that do not conform to heteronormative ideals are often considered failures because they do not meet social standards. Jack Halberstam discusses the rhetoric surrounding queer identities in the dominant culture, stating, “Capitalist logic casts the homosexual as inauthentic and unreal, as incapable of proper love and unable to make the appropriate connections between sociality, relationality, family, sex, desire, and consumption” (95). In the dominant culture, queerness is defined by what it is unable to do. Queer people are supposedly unable to have fulfilling platonic relationships, fall in love, or have children and families. These actions, which are defined by the boundaries of heterosexuality, constitute success and happiness in the dominant culture. Because queer people are

⁴ In Chapter Three, I will further discuss outward queer embodiment and its role in creating a sense of community.

perceived as not being able to participate in these social rituals in ways defined by heteronormativity, they are subsequently outcast.

Queerness often creates rifts in existing relationships and support systems. While many queer people are not entirely cut off from family and friends, the rhetoric surrounding queerness and its supposed inability to uphold heteronormative ideals often creates distance and isolation. Halberstam further explains, “Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalistic practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique” (89). Queerness represents a failure to uphold social concepts of success and conformity. In this way, queerness itself is associated with failure and negativity. The refusal to uphold social standards furthers the outcasting of queer individuals from the dominant culture. Queer people are denied the support of the larger dominant community and therefore are in need of one for themselves. This need for community feeds into queer taste. Bourdieu writes, “The specific effort of the taste for necessity, which never ceases to act though unseen—because its action combines with that of necessity—is most clearly seen when it is, in a sense, operating out of pace, having survived the disappearance of the conditions which produced it” (374). This necessity leads to the formation of queer taste centered around queer culture. Queer people cultivate tastes based on what the queer community upholds as “good.” However, queerness is often not defined by a set of homogeneous traits and measures of success, rather it, again, seems to be defined by how it differs from the dominant culture. In this way, queerness becomes a collection of outcast sexual and

gender identities marked as failures by dominant expectations. Gerard Delanty states, “Many of the new social movements . . . have made collective identity central to their politics and, where this has not been explicitly the case, many movements owe their influence to their ability to create powerful collective identities” (122). This collection of identities-in-failure forms queer counter-culture. Because the dominant culture has rejected queer expression and marked it as failure, queer counter-culture exists in direct opposition of the standards and expectations of the dominant ideologies .

Protest is public and takes up space. Queer disruption takes place in the form of groups. Because it is defined as failure by the dominant culture, when it exists outside of queer centered spaces, it becomes disruptive to dominant culture norms. Halberstam argues, “One form of queer art has made failure its centerpiece and has cast queerness as the dark landscape of confusion, loneliness, alienation, impossibility, and awkwardness. . . . but the social and symbolic systems that tether queerness to loss and failure cannot be wished away; some would say, nor should they be” (97). The negative connotations that come with visible queerness garner discomfort, but with that discomfort comes the questioning of cultural norms. Disruption of norms allows for the questioning of norms. Before the internet, protest and disruption involved physical gatherings of members of the community. Regina Kunzel notes, “Early lesbian and gay history projects hosted fundraisers at pride marches and leather bars. Their members salvaged documents of queer life and turned their apartments into archives to collect and preserve them. They engaged community audiences through public lectures, slide shows, exhibits, and articles in the gay press” (1560). In these ways, queer people were, and still are, able to bring their identities forward through group gatherings. By bringing people together for the

purpose of making themselves visible, queer people were not only able to preserve their history and lifestyle but bring their group identity to the attention of the dominant culture. Queer taste and queer habitus are put on display as the failures of cultural norms that they are. Public protest allows for visible queer identities to gather, take up space, and be seen by the dominant culture. Elizabeth Currans explains, “Participants carve out spaces where they can gain a foothold; they exploit openings provided by those with power and struggle to expand the space available for other ways of being” (3). Queer people use the physical space of public protest to bring queer spaces out of dark bars and clubs and out of gay neighborhoods into the public eye. Bringing these spaces outward asserts the existence of queer people and their supposed failure of cultural norms.

By bringing groups of queer people together in spaces outside of queer centered ones, queer people then bring that queer counter-culture outward. In these moments, queer culture, on a mass scale, is made visible. Currans further explains, “Space is never neutral. It always carries political and cultural meanings. Overt and subtle clues code spaces with gendered, racialized, sexualized, nationalized, and classed meanings. Multiple practices limit who enters or is comfortable in public spaces and what people are able to do in these spaces” (4). The purpose for bringing the queer community into the public eye through protest is not only to fight for the rights they have been denied, but to also bring forward the culture of this community and disrupt dominant cultural ways of thinking. Since queer taste and habitus formed as ways to resist and subvert the strict binaries of the dominant culture, their visibility to the dominant culture is imperative to their existence. They exist, in part, in order to critique, disrupt, and dismantle harmful expressive restrictions placed on human beings by the dominant culture, so it is important

that they become visible outside of queer spaces in order to perform the function that fostered their creation.

Group visibility and individual visibility are at the heart of the performance of queer habitus. Outward visibility of the community not only functions to dismantle dominant ideas about expression and performance, but also communicates to other queer people who live invisibly among the dominant culture. Currans notes,

Queering public space through demonstrating dyke pride creates public cultures modeling alternative visions of social relations . . . the New York Dyke March favors a politics of deviance intended to push back against social norms by reveling in gender and sexual expressions deemed outside the norm. Critiquing norms rather than the ascription of deviance to particular bodies and identities provides another way of being in public. Overt displays of denigrated behaviors create a space of openness and acceptance that values exploration over conformity. (44)

By demonstrating queer taste and habitus within the dominant culture, queer people communicate the possibility of cultural norms and expectations outside of the expectations of the dominant culture. While the visible queer community disrupts the dominant culture with the performance of rejected identities, it acts as a beacon to those who feel suffocated by the rigid heteronormativity and cisnormativity of the dominant culture. These performances, both individual and collective, demonstrate the possibility of “failure” as a valid option. Muñoz further explains, “Disidentification is a mode of performance whereby a toxic identity is remade and infiltrated by subjects who have been hailed by such identity categories but have not been able to own such a label.

Disidentification is therefore about the management of an identity that has been ‘spoiled’ in the majoritarian public sphere” (185). Taking rejected labels and identities and performing them proudly, among others, in a space not meant for queer identities gives power to those embodying them. Furthermore, it rejects the idea that these identities are inherently “failed” or “spoiled,” when really, they just embody what the dominant culture considered bad taste and taboo. By creating and performing a habitus that rejects dominant norms, people are given other options for identity performance, which are then communicated outside of queer spaces in order to allow more people to question their devotion to cultural norms. However, performing these identities outside of queer spaces safely is a privilege. Muñoz asserts, “At times, resistance needs to be pronounced and direct; on other occasions, queers of color and other minority subjects need to follow a conformist path if they hope to survive a hostile public sphere” (5). This hostility highlights the importance of group embodiment and group disruption in dominant cultural spaces. Safety is provided in numbers as well as encouragement and validation. However, white, able-bodied queer people are still able to disrupt the dominant culture more easily and more safely, although their identities may be more palatable for the dominant culture. This is among the most important reasons for group embodiment in protest and visibility. Spreading the ideologies of queer counter-culture ideally makes it easier for queer people with less privilege, specifically queer people of color, to simply exist.

The formation of the queer community has led to a unique and diverse community that is recognized for its performance and expression. The formation of queer spaces where people could gather and experiment and express themselves authentically

led to the creation of a counter-culture that directly opposed the dominant one. This opposition to the dominant culture and critique of its oppressive systems were expressed through embodiment and gender performances that were celebrated rather than rejected and shamed. Within these queer spaces, people's tastes changed to reflect queer counter-culture over the tastes of the dominant culture. Outside of these spaces, the community came together in order to be visible and not only protest inhuman oppression, but also assert their subversive embodiments, both individually and collectively. The community itself—this collection of individuals having come together in spaces of creativity and expression—is where queer habitus reigns.

Chapter 3: Personal Presentation, Language, and the Ephemeral Space of the Internet

The introduction of the internet to the queer community meant it was able to expand beyond the physical space of urban queer interactions. Because the internet does not exist as a physical space and functions to create connections with people who may not be geographically close through chat rooms and later social media, the queer community outside of these urban spaces has grown and thrived. Through the use of the internet, the queer community has become much more widespread and accessible than the original physical spaces of queer interaction; this new ephemeral queer space has fostered the creation of language and the evolution of queer embodiment in ways that reflect our new widespread culture.

The Internet and the New Intangible Queer Space

Urban physical queer spaces such as night clubs, bath houses, and gay neighborhoods are declining rapidly largely due to their inaccessibility. Spaces like these are most common in urban areas, so those who inhabit them are mainly those who inhabit urban areas or places in close proximity to these urban areas. Limiting queer spaces to urban areas keeps the physical presence of the community in certain geographical areas, which are mainly cities. Furthermore, this limitation creates the idea that cities are the only places in which queer people exist or that it is safe for queer people to exist. This misconception creates a tension between urban and rural areas within the community. Jack Halberstam explains, “The division between urban and rural or urban and small town has had a major impact on the ways in which the queer community has been formed and perceived in the United States. Until recently, small towns were considered hostile to queers and urban areas were cast as the queer’s natural environment” (*In a Queer Time*

and Place 22). The idea that queer people only exist or should only exist in urban environments excludes those who exist outside of these spaces, creating the perception that there are no queer people in the suburbs or on farms; those areas were reserved for and only occupied by heterosexuals. This effectively erases the experiences of queer people in rural areas and small towns, isolating them from the existing community and preventing connections from being made. It is important to note the role of both class and race in this situation. Urban areas are often much more expensive to live in as well as largely segregated along race lines creating division within the community. Queer urban spaces became separated by race. Ball culture was largely the work of queer African Americans. The perception of queer culture, however, remains largely white in media, and this portrayal of the community as white has erased the experiences of queer people of color⁵.

Similarly, urban queer spaces are often seen as party spaces reserved for sex, alcohol, and drugs, promoting the idea that being queer means being involved in these activities. These activities exclude young queer people from queer spaces, or more harmfully, influence them to become involved in these activities at a young age. The introduction of the internet created much more accessibility to young people and those who felt out of place in party spaces. In a study of *Tumblr* users, Paul Byron notes, “queer people do not always find comfort in queer spaces . . . This notion of belonging to, yet also experiencing discomfort in, queer spaces resonates with many of our participants’ accounts of how they position themselves in *Tumblr* as well as in queer life

⁵In chapter four, I will discuss further the exploitation of queer identities in the media and the erasure of the experiences of queer people of color.

more generally” (2248). Physical urban queer spaces as party spaces exclude not only those who are too young or too far away to participate, but also exclude those who do not wish to participate in these activities as well. The representation of queer culture confined to sex, drugs, and alcohol excludes not only a large portion of people, and simplifies and flattens real lived queer experiences.

The internet provides a much more inclusive and accessible space in which to participate in queer culture, and this, in turn, has shaped queer culture in recent years. Access to peer generated and shared information shapes what the community comes to look like. The queer community exists around a network of people, knowledge, and traditions. Michel Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality*, “Sexuality . . . is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another” (106). This expansive surface network relies on the passing on of information, of traditions, of knowledge about sexuality, gender, discourse, and disruption. This is what keeps the queer community thriving and growing. The community has moved out of purely physical spaces that exclude certain people and flatten the perception of the queer identity.

The internet has provided a new extensive network for queer people to reach out and participate in queer life. When seeking information, queer youth and others discovering their sexuality typically turn to the internet. In a study of how queer people

are getting information surrounding queerness and the coming out process, Judah S. Hamer, director of the Rutherford Public Library in New Jersey, explains,

The Internet activities such as participation in chat rooms, on listservs, and making e-mail connections via personal Web pages, were . . . directed toward meeting other gay teens . . . The desire to construct an understanding of coming-out and gay identity from other gay people may also be detected in study participants' suggestion of gay mentors as an information source. (83)

Ideally, older queer people would be able to mentor young queer people; however, there is a generational rift between them. This is due to a lack of connection formed from the exclusion of young people from queer spaces and limited access to queer historical knowledge as well as there simply being no places to facilitate the meeting of younger and older queer people. This separation has pushed young queer people to turn to the internet rather than older queer mentors, only furthering the rift between generations. The significant separation and lack of understanding between the two has caused a decent amount of animosity among both groups for the other. Jack Halberstam writes, “It seems now, in some ways, as if older and younger trans* people occupy different realities and think differently about the past and future” (*Trans** 64). While some queer history has made its way to popular internet spaces such as *Tumblr* and *Instagram*, queer youth are largely disconnected from queer history. This means that since only pieces of queer history have made their way to popular internet spaces, only pieces of queer history have influenced contemporary queer culture. Furthermore, these pieces of history, such as language, gestures, and traditions like drag, are often removed from their original

contexts and have become simulacra of their original meanings⁶. Drag and its portrayal in media has become very far removed from its origins. While originally drag was never necessarily about perfectly emulating womanhood and instead was more focused on the performance as a critique of femininity. Contemporary drag, as it is perceived on television and on social media has largely become about looking indistinguishable from a cisgendered woman. Furthermore, these pieces of media such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* are circulated around the internet in the form of fragmented clips, gifs, and posts and removed from their original context because the origin of both the content and the origin of the practice of drag are never acknowledged. Pieces of drag culture are then circulated and taken up by the dominant culture. This process is similar to the way queer language becomes appropriated in popular culture. Slang terms such as “slay” and “tea” are often invented by queer people of color who do drag before being appropriated by white queer people and from there by the dominant culture.

Despite this removal from queer history, the internet has provided a significant resource for young queer people who are exploring their identities. It has also provided them support and access to a new and more present space in which to participate in queer culture. The internet has become an important resource for young people, and “[r]esearch over the past two decades has shown how LGBTIQ+ young people use digital spaces to explore identity, obtain peer support, and access (sub)cultural information . . . [O]nline anonymity is useful to young people exploring noncisgender and nonheterosexual identities through connecting with peers” (Byron 2242). This alternative and ephemeral

⁶In chapter four, I will be diving deeper into the internet’s removal of queer culture from its original context and how this disconnection and appropriation is inherently influenced by capitalism.

queer space provides what queer mentors are unable to provide, and it begins to create a new space in which queer culture continues to be produced and reproduced resistant to the dominant culture which is present even online. Halberstam emphasizes, “The history of alternative political formations is important because it contests social relations as given and allows us to access traditions of political action that, while not necessarily successful in the sense of becoming dominant, do offer models of contestation, rupture, and discontinuity for the political present” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 19). The continuation and evolution of queer culture on the internet has moved queer culture into the present where it can continue to resist oppressive dominant cultural norms which still exist both off and on the internet.

Language and the Internet

The internet, as a place that largely communicates and connects people through text-based formats and collaborative thinking, has fostered an environment in which language has evolved to fit the queer community. Instead of creating physical spaces for ourselves, we create language to make space for ourselves in our vernacular. We disrupt the dominant language with words of our own to force recognition. This collaborative space allows for the collective exploration of identity and language used to signify these identities. In our culture, having language to solidify and define and express experiences can be incredibly important to individuals who have been denied representation and a means of communicating an identity that falls outside of dominant definitions of gender and sexuality. Identifiers such as “pansexual” and “agender” have recently appeared as ways to describe both sexuality and gender respectively. These words have been created and circulated around the internet and are now widely accepted as ways to identify

among members of the queer community. Halberstam expresses, “Naming, needless to say, is a powerful activity and one that has been embedded in modern productions of expertise and knowledge production” (*Trans** 4). The power to name an identity for oneself to define feelings and experiences allows for the solidification of identity and the way queer people perceive their own experiences. Without the language, it is impossible to identify sexuality or gender outside of the dominant binary. The act of naming allows for interpellation; the creation of language allows for a means by which to be recognized and acknowledged as queer and as part of a community. This creation of language helps to curate a sense of belonging which is missing for the queer individual in the dominant culture.

These terms often create identities. Those who identify with these terms then strive to embody them. Modern queer aesthetics are now largely born and spread through the internet. Instead of these aesthetics being produced in night clubs and gay neighborhoods, they are cultivated on social media platforms such as *Instagram* which is largely image based and emphasizes aesthetics. Much the same way styles are cultivated through social media in the dominant culture, style in queer culture is created and communicated and subsequently emulated through social media. In this way, queer taste is now created on the internet. The internet has created images that correlate with these identities. Bourdieu writes,

The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalized, ‘embodied’ social structures.

These practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by ‘reasonable’ behaviour with it implements classificatory schemes . . . historical scheme of

perception and appreciation which are the product of the object of division into classes. (468)

Bourdieu notes that physical embodiment of class is an unconscious representation of one's social class. In queer culture, this representation of queerness becomes less unconscious than Bourdieu's ideas of class as participation in the queer community is a conscious decision to seek out and emulate queer styles. On the internet, images are often built around identities. For example, on *Tumblr* and *Instagram*, the image of the bisexual with cuffed jeans and tucked in shirt, the association of enamel pins and denim jackets with queerness, and the association of flannel shirts with lesbianism are all images that correlate to language used to define identity. These images exist for other purposes but are taken up as representative of queerness.

Queer people often gravitate toward alternative styles of presentation that reject normative styles of dress and presentation, and these style are then attributed to queer identities. For example Butler notes, "The productions swerve from their original purposes and inadvertently mobilize possibilities of 'subjects' that do not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible" (40). This creation of language and correlating images are anchor points through which queer people may find both acceptance and a means through which to express their identities. These images stray dangerously close to stereotypes; however, these images are collective composites created by overlapping aesthetics among those who identify with certain labels. These aesthetics are then hailed as expressions of identity. Butler further notes, "This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and

social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the ‘integrity’ of the subject” (185). These particular aesthetic embodiments serve to communicate queerness and initiate contact and relationships with other queer people. This contact is what brings about interpellation and names them as part of the queer community thus furthering a sense of acknowledgment and belonging. Embodiments of these collective images and aesthetics that are linked to certain identities and have become markers of that specific identity serve as both a means of connection and expression.

In the same way, subversive expressions of gender are often directly linked or opposed to dominant ideas of gender expression. Anna I. Corwin notes, “Modifications to gendered signs are made possible or impossible within different cultural contexts, and they are always interconnected with other culturally relevant categories such as class, ethnicity, and communities of practice” (263). Through the cultural context of the dominant culture, ideas of masculinity and femininity are prescribed to specific bodies by the dominant culture. Embodiments that directly reflect masculinity and femininity in bodies not ascribed these expressions by the dominant culture, while still subverting dominant ideas of which bodies should emulate these gendered expressions, can sometimes reify these ideas of masculinity and femininity. However, the collective cultural examination and awareness of gendered clothing and embodiment within the queer community, which often happen in online spaces such as *Tumblr*, allows for the critiquing and rejection of the binary expectations of the dominant culture.

However, sexuality is a fluid experience whereas language is a solid human construction with set boundaries and definitions. These words become signifiers for fluid human experiences, and may also pigeonhole individuals into identities that do not quite fit their experiences. Labels of identification often become personalized in the ways that each person describes their experiences. In this way, language becomes flexible in order to fit individual identities. Halberstam explains, “Seeing language in this way, as a shifting ecosystem within which words might fly, fall, or fail to convey their message, but also one within which words might hover over the multiplicity to which they point, relieves us of the mundane task of simply getting the name right” (*Trans** 9). Labels like “pansexual” and “bisexual,” which often mean the same thing for many individuals, are differentiated based on personal preference⁷. Both of these terms are often held in contention, and their definitions and differences are constantly being debated; however, both contain a multiplicity of definitions that cover the wide spectrum of being attracted to multiple genders. In this way, the language used by individuals to express identity remains flexible. Halberstam further explains, “All of these terms have emerged within communities seeking for ways to name and explain their multiplicity: in other words, they are not medical terms or psychiatric terms produced in institutional contexts . . . rather, they are terms that emerge from trial and error, everyday usage, and political expediency” (*Trans** 10). The creation of these terms is a collaborative effort among queer people to attempt to define and express fluid experiences of gender and sexuality.

⁷“Bisexual” is a term that has been used for much longer than the digital queer community has been in existence. The original use of “bisexual” meant much the same thing as “pansexual,” i.e. someone who is attracted to people regardless of gender, means today.

As Halberstam notes, these are not medical terms created by doctors in relation to physical or mental ailments; these are terms that have been created as an attempt to create language which creates room for non-heterosexual and non-cisgendered identities within the language of the dominant culture.

What Queer Embodiment Looks Like Now

In the past, physical spaces were necessary for being seen and recognized as queer and therefore interpellated as part of queer counter-culture. In the way that queer habitus began in physical spaces, queer habitus and protest have evolved to accommodate our more extensive community. While the queer community still has access to some of these physical spaces, it is no longer necessary for queer lives revolve around them. Subversion and disruption are less about the community as a whole and more about personal aesthetic performances. Embodiment has always been deeply personal, but with the internet, embodiment has become an even more complicated marker of queer habitus, taste, and aesthetics. Bourdieu writes of embodiment,

The chances of experiencing one's own body as a vessel of grace, a continuous miracle, are that much greater when bodily capacity is commensurate with recognition; and, conversely, the probability of experiencing the body with unease, embarrassment, timidity grows with the disparity between the ideal body and the real body . . . reflected in the reactions of others⁸. (207)

One's connection with the body is inherently related to the culture one exists within. For queer people participating in queer culture, the relationship to the body is even more complicated. Queerness of the body not only involves fashion choices and haircuts, but

⁸Bourdieu notes that the same is true of speech and language.

also gender performances and sexuality performances which often present safety issues. For queer people, the relationship to the body is a precarious one. Queer bodies have been critiqued, gawked at, and invaded in ways that heteronormative and cisnormative bodies are not, and online, queer bodies are even more removed from being seen as human. Queerness is often seen as just images or text on a screen to be easily appropriated or dismissed.

Queer bodies often inherently do not fit into the demands of the dominant culture, creating dissonance within queer people. In this way, embodiment of queer counter-culture becomes imperative for queer people to experience their bodies as “vessels of grace.” Butler’s definition of embodiment notes the connection between the body and the core identity. She writes, “In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause” (185). In this way, a person’s core identity can be shown on the surface of the body. Clothes, gestures, and presentations of the body indicate some inherent notion of identity within the person. The way one chooses to present oneself is a choice to reveal part of one’s identity. One can cultivate an online identity on social media sites through the use of profile pictures, profile biographies, selfies, and participation in online discussion. This choice to reveal part of one’s identity is a choice based in being recognized. It is in this way that embodiment then connects to taste and habitus. Queer habitus and taste require a collective recognition of the embodiment queer aesthetics, an embodiment that is a very conscious break from the normative. One must choose to participate in queer counter-culture, so queer taste is much more intentional

than Bourdieu's original idea. Bourdieu explains taste as a subconscious creation of an image, correlating with culture, class, etc., in order to be perceived in a specific way. For queer people, this taste must be cultivated in a much more conscious way. The choice to participate in a counter-culture rather than the dominant one requires an understanding of what this counter-culture perceives as good taste and then a choice to embody that in order to gain social capital within this counter-culture. On the internet in particular, participation in queer counter-culture requires the individual seeking out and curation of queer spaces on social media sites such as *Twitter*, *Tumblr*, and *Instagram* by following certain accounts which display and express queer cultural ideas and aesthetics.

Within queer counter-culture specifically, embodiment of identity is inherently tied not only to expression and performance, but also to power. Due to the emphasis and fascination with sex and genitalia that the dominant culture fixates upon with queer peoples' bodies, queer bodies are constantly put on display. Foucault explains the relationship between sexuality and power saying, "sexuality is tied to recent devices of power; it has been expanding at an increasing rate since the seventeenth century; the arrangement that has sustained it is not governed by reproduction; it has been linked from the outset with an intensification of the body—with its exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power" (107). Although the dominant culture constantly mocks and exploits queer bodies sexually, this also provides an avenue through which queer people may empower themselves. This subversive empowerment has become a marker of queer embodiment that stems from historical queer culture and has carried over into queer embodiment on the internet. Conversely, the internet also provides a space in which to consume new media which is either read as or is explicitly

queer. These pieces of media and pop culture then become part of queer culture and embodiment. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains,

The ability to attach identity to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learn to invest these sites with fascination and love. (3)

The internet's access to and amplification of pop culture has only served to heighten the queer fascination with pop culture icons. Pieces of media that are queer coded and interpreted as queer coded by queer people, such as Disney villains, then influence queer embodiment in those who try to emulate these characters or icons both in online spaces through profile pictures, manners of speech, *Pinterest* boards and *Tumblr* blogs dedicated to these icons; and off the internet through manners of dress and speech. This emulation further embeds queer meaning into the original media.

The way we perform our identity is often very visible. The way we walk, dress, and sit are cited as markers of a queer identity by other queer people. This then encourages us to embody these "queer" gestures and styles. We act in ways that are recognizable to other queer people, subverting expectations to gain cultural capital outside of the dominant culture. Bourdieu discusses the body and how its physical presence and its perception are markers of one's class, noting, "The social representation of [one's] own body which each agent has to reckon with, from the very beginning, in order to build up his subjective image of his body and his bodily hexis, is thus obtained by applying a social system of classification based on the same principle as the social

products to which it is applied” (193). One’s embodiment of habitus and taste are inexorably linked to one’s position in the social structure. This can be applied to queer counter-culture in that a queer person’s embodiment of queerness is linked to their position as a member of this counter-culture. Online, this is made even more clear by the cultivation of online identities. This embodiment is as a clear marker to other queer people and sometimes those outside of the queer community that this person is not a member of the dominant culture. Butler further explains, “The fantasized body can never be understood in relation to the body as real; it can only be understood in relation to another culturally instituted fantasy, one which claims the place of the ‘literal’ and ‘real’” (96). In queer culture, ideas about presentation and embodiment are spread much the same way they are spread in the dominant culture. These ideas in the queer community, however, look different than they do in the dominant culture and are often based in subverting the dominant culture. Queer people create their method of identity presentation based on what the queer community uplifts. In this way collective queer taste is cultivated and subsequently emulated and recreated. Certain styles of embodiment are then inducted into the collective unconscious of queer habitus.

These embodiments that emulate queer taste then communicate queerness to other members of the queer community. Since the queer community no longer exists exclusively in queer spaces, we are constantly on the lookout for other queer people with whom we can connect and communicate with. We embody queer taste to signify membership. Halberstam describes, “we are drawn to bodies that seem new or different in ways that are visualizable and verifiable. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, masculine women and male dandies provided visual markers of irreversible

shifts in the meaning of the gendered body within new forms of capitalism” (*Trans** 30).

We look for people who fulfill these subversive presentations, even in subtle ways.

Through the internet, certain trends, such as wearing flannel or floral shirts, are subtle enough indicators which might signal queerness. Haircuts are often much less subtle performances which may indicate queerness. On websites such as *Pinterest* and *Instagram* where the format is primarily image-based, styles of dress and haircuts are circulated among queer people and eventually come to signify queerness. While not solely image based, *Tumblr* is another platform on which queer aesthetic are cultivated accompanies by jokes and comments meant to reify these significations in a way that will cultivate connections. For example, one might accompany a post about a new shirt or haircut with a caption stating that this style is another indicator of their identity. While performing too outside of dominant norms presents a significant safety risk, the reward of community and belonging often outweighs this fear. Halberstam further notes, “It is this understanding of ‘textual darkness,’ or the darkness of a particular reading practice from a particular subject position, that I believe resonates with the queer aesthetics I trace here as a catalogue of resistance through failure” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 97). The reading of certain presentations which, as Halberstam puts it, fail to meet dominant standards, often of masculinity or femininity, as queer, encourages other queer people to further emulate these styles in hopes of connection and subversion.

As a form of protest, these acts have become deeply personal. We, therefore, embody disruption. Protest becomes part of our everyday identities. We exist as queer outside of the spaces where we feel safe in order to confront the dominant culture, and

this confrontation in itself has become a marker of our own culture. Halberstam describes existing in a body that does not conform to the dominant culture saying,

Seeing trans* bodies differently, then—not simply as trans bodies that provide an image of the nonnormative against which normative bodies can be discerned, but as bodies that are fragmentary and internally contradictory, bodies that remap gender and its relations to race, place, class, and sexuality, bodies that are in pain or that represent a play of surfaces, bodies that sound different than they look, bodies that represent palimpsestic relations to identity—means finding different visual, aural, and haptic codes through which to figure the experience of being in a body. (*Trans** 89)

Bodies that defy the expectations of the dominant culture, that resist being classified and interpellated in binary and normative ways, are inherently disruptive when existing in spaces of the dominant culture. When existing in a body that inherently subverts dominant cultural expectations, protest becomes a deeply personal embodiment of identity and culture. Queer taste becomes something that subverts heteronormative expectations and dismantles ideas of binary gender. Foucault writes, “This . . . enables us to understand sex as a political issue. It was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand it was tied to the disciplines of the body: the harnessing, intensification, and distribution of forces, the adjustment and economy of energies” (145). In this way, sex and embodiment are always a political matter, especially for queer people whose embodiment and sex are always put on display to be either scrutinized or uplifted. Any embodiment of queerness is inherently political because queerness itself has become inherently political. This creates a tension

between the desire to participate in queer counter-culture and taste as well as authentic expression and choice to make one's body into a political statement.

In making one's body into a political statement, however, there is the opportunity to reject and attempt to overturn systems of oppressive power. Muñoz's theory of disidentification explains just that. He states, "disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology. Disidentification resists the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus" (97). Here Muñoz describes a way in which queer embodiment aims to dismantle systems of power. By rejecting dominant ideologies, queer embodiment brings protest to everyday life. Protest does not need to exist as large crowds in front of a government building, although that is also effective. With the embodiment of queerness and its new widespread community, protest becomes a fact of everyday life for queer people. Muñoz further explains "This . . . reacts against the forced gender prescriptions that such systems reproduce. This mode of mimicry is theatrical inasmuch as it mimes and renders hyperbolic the symbolic ritual that it is signifying upon" (78). Rebellious against gender norms and other heteronormative and cisnormative systems of oppression becomes accessible through clothing, hairstyles, gestures, etc. without organizing huge group protests. Simply being visible to the dominant culture in a way that disrupts normative forms of embodiment calls these standards to attention, and by bringing these standards to attention, some may begin to question them. These ideas of subversion through embodiment and aesthetics are all circulated through the internet.

The internet has created a platform through which the queer community has been able to expand and evolve and be recognized. Unlike physical queer spaces such as nightclubs and gay neighborhoods, the internet is much more accessible, both geographically and for reasons related to age, interest, and race. The internet has also fostered the creation of new language to try and encompass queer experiences, and along with this language, queer aesthetics have been cultivated. In this way the internet has allowed for the evolution of queer embodiment creating new ways to communicate with other queer people publicly as well as to protest dominant cultural norms in deeply personal and embodied ways. The internet has expanded the space in which queer people may be recognized and interpellated into a counter-culture, which resists the dominant culture. Here, queer people are given a community and a place to belong.

Chapter 4: Michelle Visage Ruined Drag: Queer Habitus and the Complications of Capitalism

While queer taste and habitus formed from a counter-culture based in protest has evolved to fit the queer community in the more ephemeral space of the internet, capitalism has begun to complicate these practices. Through capitalism, people in power take the parts of queer culture that are least disruptive and most palatable to the dominant culture and makes them the most visible. It also has begun to further restrict access to physical queer spaces of gathering. In these ways, capitalism is able to influence the queer taste and habitus. Those who are more visible have more power over the queer habitus; therefore, the queer habitus has become mixed up in capitalistic goals through gentrification and commodification.

The Gentrification of Queer Spaces

Capitalism has disrupted the physical spaces of the queer community. Urban areas where physical queer spaces exist are being gentrified. This means the removal of many poor queer people and even the removal of these spaces altogether. Bourdieu explains, the unity hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of practices performed in fields governed by different logics with the formula: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice . . . also conceals the structure of the symbolic spaces marked out by the whole set of these structured practices, all the distinct and distinctive life-styles which are always defined objectively and sometimes subjectively in and through their mutual relationships. (101)

According to Bourdieu, spaces, specifically neighborhoods and spaces of living, are inherently classified by social status. Gentrification does something interesting in that it

takes spaces formerly reserved for the lower and lowest classes and “improves” them, encouraging those of higher status to move into the areas. These “improvements” however, force out the lower class due to increased pricing. Queer spaces, such as the gay bars and neighborhoods mentioned in Chapter Two, are becoming increasingly commodified. In an article examining the gentrification of queer spaces in London, Ben Campkin and Laura Marshall note,

The increasing desirability of a neighbourhood and the associated value of development are key factors in the context of a built environment that has become intensely commodified, to the point where most social and cultural venues struggle to find affordable space. A number of such property developments have been strongly opposed . . . by local and wider LGBTQ+ communities. (92)

As lower income areas of cities, where gay bars and clubs tend to exist, become gentrified, the queer community has been progressively encroached upon. Due to increased pricing of spaces, queer spaces of gathering begin to be shut down in large quantities. Campkin and Marshall also point out, “the provision of LGBTQ+ night-venues has suffered an even more dramatic fall than has been seen for pubs in the UK overall; and LGBTQ+ night-venues have suffered disproportionately in London’s wider losses of nightclubs and grassroots music venues” (82). The correlation between lower-income areas of cities and queer spaces of gathering means the queer community is affected in a disproportionate amount compared to other types of establishments. The shutting down of queer spaces of gathering has been another factor in the community’s move towards the internet. Now even urban queer populations are becoming increasingly isolated from one another and seek out these connections through social media platforms.

This means that habitus is almost entirely created in online spaces. The further isolation of individual queer people also increases the desire to outwardly present in a way, as mentioned in Chapter Three, that may signal queerness to other queer people in order to form face to face relationships. Here, online queer culture crosses with queer culture in physical spaces. Embodiments uplifted online make their way to the physical world, bringing queer culture outward.

Queer spaces that are not shut down are again only accessible to those who are physically close to them, those who can afford to live in such areas. All of these factors combined have created a hierarchy of representation, visibility, and access in the queer community. Gentrification further restricts who has access to queer spaces. Middle-class, white, and cis queer people are largely the population that can afford to live near and frequent surviving establishments. In a study analyzing the correlation between same-sex couples in an area and gentrification, David Christafore and Susane Leguizamon specify, “this is largely driven by higher income, White gays and lesbians, so should not be generalized to all gay and lesbian households and neighborhoods. Indeed . . . neighborhoods in Atlanta find that gays and lesbians may be displaced as a result of gentrification, rather than a driver of gentrification” (997). Queer people of color are being forced out of their neighborhoods in favor of white queer people. While the upper/middle-class white queer people do not experience displacement and even benefit from an area’s gentrification, lower-class queer people, largely consisting of queer people of color, often can no longer afford to live in an area once it has been gentrified and are therefore forced out of neighborhoods that may have historical queer significance.

Lower-class queer people and queer people of color are then largely stripped of and deprived queer history and culture. Similarly, Campkin and Marshall write,

Several respondents who commented on the ‘gay scene’s’ commercial focus felt that it was geared towards middle-class audiences, and was often exclusionary because of its economic profile or other forms of standardisation and discrimination. In particular, Soho was associated with commercial, unfriendly and ‘sanitised’ forms of LGBTQ+ nightlife (87).

This “sanitization” further shapes what these queer spaces look like. Instead of being sites of diversity and acceptance, they largely cater to and are appropriated by upper/middle-class, white, cis, gay men. Campkin and Marshall also point out, “our research highlights an enduring predominance of venues owned by and serving a majority clientele of white, cisgender, non-disabled, middle-class men” (90). Queer spaces of gathering that still exist, now exist only for certain types of queer people, mainly the queer people who can afford to be close enough to gain access and pay the prices of the newly gentrified space. Furthermore, it is largely white, cisgendered, gay men who are able to own and operate these businesses in gentrified areas, and therefore are the ones who have influence over how the culture of the space forms.

Commodification in Queer Media

In a similar way, queer people who gain popularity in the media are often the least disruptive in their identities. This makes queer identity more palatable for the dominant culture and reinforces the dominant ideals. As the dominant culture becomes more accepting for queer identities, representations of these identities appear more and more in entertainment. However, the identities that are portrayed are often the ones that fall, as

much as possible, within the constraints of dominant hegemonic ideals. Bourdieu explains, “[o]ne only has to bear in mind that goods are converted into distinctive signs, which may be signs of distinction but also vulgarity, as soon as they are perceived relationally, to see that the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality” (483). Though queerness on television represents a “vulgar” social distinction, in portraying identities which conform to dominant ideals, these portrayals reify dominant ideals rather than disrupt them in the ways that are often originally intended. In an interrogation of queer media, Michael Yaksich explains, “The commodification of culture is a process through which the habits of the consumption of real commodities spread into relationships with culture. This results in the liquidation of cultural traditions whereby fundamentals of a particular culture are taken from their traditional context” (26). Queer identities that are made visible to the dominant culture by media that is created by the dominant culture often serve a purpose that ultimately benefits the dominant culture. By controlling how these portrayals appear, the dominant culture is able to control the evolution of queer taste and habitus.

For example, the television reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race (RPDR)* depicts drag queens competing for money and notoriety. As mentioned in previous chapters, drag is originally intended to parody normative gender; however, on *RPDR*, it is often queens who conform the most to dominant ideals of both gender presentation and race that are rewarded. In their article, “Serving Fishy Realness: Representations of Gender Equity on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*,” Jorge C. Gázquez and Kameron C. Cavazos explain, “From the beginning of *RPDR*, the audience is presented with a formal position that fishiness is

valued over butchness⁹ with regards to the presentation of gender among the drag queen contestants. In the drag community, fishiness refers to the presentation of hyper-femininity and a consistent portrayal of physiological femaleness” (663). In rewarding drag queens who inherently reify ideas about femininity and gender roles, more drag queens are encouraged to emulate this type of “fishy” drag, and since it is a popular and easily accessible television show, this has begun to reshape the purpose and meaning of drag. Ganzáles and Cavaros further explain, “This denigration would often take the form of a lack of acceptance among the contestants and early dismissal of queens whose art specialized in blurring the gender lines. Queens would be chastised for choosing a character or an outfit that would ‘read as boy’, which means not entirely hyper-feminine” (663). Drag queens whose drag is more experimental and/or less “fishy,” are punished with elimination. The earlier the elimination, the less chances of success outside *RPDR* drag queens have. For drag queens, *RPDR* has become the pinnacle of a career. To appear on *RPDR* is a sign of ultimate success in the drag community. *RPDR* gives drag queens a chance at international fame and commercial success, which is incredibly hard to gain while doing drag outside of television. This is why many drag queens elect to conform to the standards of the show. The more drag is represented in a way that reifies heteronormative structures, the more both heterosexual and queer people’s understanding of drag becomes removed from its origin of parody and disruption.

⁹ “Fishiness,” in the drag community, refers not only to femininity but a drag queen’s ability to appear as indistinguishable from a cisgendered woman as possible. “Butchness,” on the other hand, refers to masculine presentation and, while more commonly used among lesbians, also refers to the extent to which a drag queen is able to be recognized as a man.

Michelle Visage, who appears as a judge on every episode of *RPDR*, is a cisgendered white woman who often critiques drag queens for disruptive performances and shows a lack of knowledge of the original context of drag. However, on the show, she possesses an incredible amount of power, often swaying other judges in their views of the drag performances presented to them. Despite having no claim to the queer community, she influences both the direction in which the evolution of drag is moving as well as the ways in which drag is perceived by dominant audiences. Cael M. Keegan comments on this as gentrification of media, saying, “[q]ueer and trans people ourselves have become almost entirely absent, gentrified out of our own history by those who benefit from representing us – to themselves” (51). *RPDR*’s turn toward enforcing heteronormative ideas of femininity makes the idea of drag more palatable for straight and cisgendered audiences. The show has a major influence over how drag outside of television is performed and perceived; so because drag queens often feel they must emulate the standards of the show, drag itself has become less disruptive as an institution and much more palatable for the dominant culture. Ganzáles and Cavaroz further explain, “it is important to note that audiences may perceive this construction as indeed normal, but actually, it emerges through ‘linguistic communication and social interaction’ that deludes us into accepting dominant ideological portrayals of drag queens in traditional, heteronormative roles” (661). *RPDR* is now consumed largely by both queer and non-queer people. This appeal to wider audiences has facilitated the appropriation of queer language, styles, and performances by non-queer people. For example, “contouring,” a technique for applying makeup invented by drag queens to appear more feminine, has become an incredibly popular trend among *YouTube* makeup artists who largely are

unaware of its origin. Similarly, GIFs¹⁰ from the show are often used as humorous stand-ins in online conversations. Devon Fitzgerald Ralston and Oren Whightsel note that these GIFs, "[look] like acceptance, and yet the normative frame of the GIF limits queerness to a space where strangeness is performed for the enjoyment of the (overwhelmingly white) public without any of the complexities or intersections resonant in techne" (215). The GIF format further removes both drag itself and the drag queen it features from their original contexts, turning them into objects for entertainment and modes of emotional expression for the dominant culture. In doing this, drag is made less subversive and turned into a tool for the use of the dominant culture.

YouTube is a major platform in which queer culture is both appropriated and made palatable for dominant audiences. As a platform, *YouTube* is an easy way for queer users to both access and create content. While users may post and access content of any kind, provided it falls within *YouTube's* policy¹¹, the queer YouTubers who gain popularity and experience success outside of *YouTube* are telling. Bourdieu writes, "The most classifying and best classified of these properties are, of course, those which are overtly designated to function as signs of distinction or marks of infamy, stigmata" (482). Queer YouTubers, in particular, are often cited as representatives of the young queer population. These YouTubers who have experienced commercial success have an incredible amount of influence over the taste and habitus of the young queer community.

¹⁰ GIFs are short looping digital clips taken primarily from television shows and used for various purposes on social media sites. They are primarily used for stand-in reactions during conversation.

¹¹ It is important to note the recent controversies surrounding *YouTube's* policies on what is deemed "inappropriate content." Queer content is overwhelmingly flagged and taken down after being cited as "inappropriate."

YouTubers such as Hannah Hart, Tyler Oakley, and Troye Sivan are often white, upper/middle-class, cisgendered, and conventionally attractive. Their styles of dress do not stray far from the conventional styles of dress in the dominant culture. Their content is often not about their queerness, and yet they are cited as pillars of queerness in media. In her article, “Pink Dollars, White Collars: Queer as Folk, Valuable Viewers, and the Price of Gay TV,” Wendy Peters writes, “because whiteness and affluence are produced as unmarked ‘universal’ categories, the white, American, urbane, gays and lesbians . . . may come to symbolically stand in for all gays and lesbians especially for those with no access to, or familiarity with, queers or queer communities” (205). In citing these YouTubers as pinnacles of queerness, the perception of the queer community strays even more towards upper/middle-class, white, and cisgendered.

Their non-disruptive identity performances influence their followers to emulate these performances, which therefore influences the identity performances of young queer people to be less disruptive to the dominant culture. Ralston and Whightsel further explain, “The emphasis on the visual influences our perceptions of queerness, shaping the cultural ‘norm’ which often does not reflect the personal worlds of the users but rather conveys what that world could be” (213). In controlling who represents queerness, the dominant culture can then control who is perceived as queer. When the only representations of queerness are white, cisgendered, and upper/middle-class, only white, cisgendered, upper/middle-class queer people are given the privilege of seeing themselves represented. These limited representations also skew perceptions of what other queer people look like. Peters writes,

In terms of commodified representations of gays and lesbians, the whiteness and class privilege endemic in [*Queer as Folk*]’s content raises the issue of how the series and viewer identifications with it may entrench limiting and skewed notions of: who can be gay; how to be gay; where gays and lesbians live in the world; and what it means to be gay or lesbian (206).

While these identity performances may be authentic to each YouTuber, dominant audiences uplift their normative portrayals which subsequently encourages more normative performances in everyday life. Because of the way the media showcases what is uplifted in culture and because of limited access to queer only spaces, performances of queerness in media have significant influence over the taste and habitus of queer culture. Yaksich asserts, “While gay individuals may appear more in entertainment, depictions of their coming-out stories and cultural styles have either been transformed into mainstream versions or ignored. In relation to *Queer Eye*, the openly gay hosts are valued only as entertainment and a means for profit” (27). The uplifting of normative performances and the relegation of queer representations to tokens and entertainment and the subsequent influence these have on the performances of the community, serve to suppress the community’s history of embodied disruption as well as the turn towards more personal disruption with the community’s move toward the internet.

Corporate Appropriation of Queerness

The more visible we appear, both as individuals and as a community, the easier it is for corporations to then target, exploit, and profit off of queer identities. Capitalism complicates queer habitus by controlling who is visible. These identities, made palatable by the media, are exploited in order to make companies appear more queer-friendly.

Their more palatable version of queerness can then be taken and commodified in order to profit off of the queer community. Bourdieu writes,

A class is defined as much by its *being perceived* as its *beings*, by its consumption—which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic—as much as by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former). The Berkeleian—i.e. The petit-bourgeois—vision which reduces social being to perceived being. (483)

The visibility of the queer community has presented an opportunity for companies to exploit and profit off of queer portrayals. Since a larger portion of the population has become more supportive of social justice, corporations have started to depict queerness in advertising in order to show their supposed social awareness and bring in queer consumers. Keegan writes, “That markets in the Global North currently conceptualize disruption as the most desirable form of creativity is important in recognizing how economic and social patterns of gentrification impel corresponding aesthetic effects” (51). Corporations have begun to incorporate depictions of queer people in advertising in order to bring in queer consumers and performatively show social awareness. However, advertising schemes are always careful to not make these portrayals too overt. Gillian K. Oakenfull and Timothy B. Greenlee discuss marketing strategies that appeal to queer people but are careful not to anger their heterosexual and cisgendered consumer-base. They write, “a depiction of a same-sex couple of any gender may lead to a negative response by any mainstream consumers with a negative attitude toward homosexuality. The key to targeting gays and lesbians in mainstream media without alienating the nontarget market may be to find targeted imagery that is not detected as such by

mainstream consumers” (423). Advertising aims to make depictions of queer people as heteronormative as possible so that they may be read as heterosexual by consumers who wish to see them that way and as queer by queer consumers. This results in depictions of queer people whose disruptive identities have been all but erased.

In portraying queerness in a way that could be perceived as heterosexual, queerness is relegated to the realm of the dominant culture and stripped of all of its own cultural histories. Queer identities are removed from any political context and turned simply into a tool for profit. In his article, “Sexual Capitalism: Marxist Reflections on Sexual Politics, Culture and Economy in the 21st Century,” Paul Reynolds writes, “the commodification of sexual life is prefigurative of a depoliticized and commodified lifestyle that divides sexual identities along class and material lines, leading to an absence of economic rights and weakness and limits to legal, political and social rights within the construction of sexual citizenship” (700). Queer identities are once again removed from context and objectified for the use of the dominant culture. In removing them from their original context, the queer community is once again depicted and perceived as mainly white, upper/middle-class, cisgendered, and more often than not, male. Steven M. Kates adds, “From a queer perspective, we ask why the two men depicted are considered positive, whereas images of people living with AIDS, drag queens, or leathermen are not. A hierarchy that presumes the cultural imperative of coupled, moderately masculine respectability, even within gay communities, is revealed” (33). These portrayals are also an attempt to affect the queer habitus itself. By popularizing certain performances of identities which align more with the dominant culture, such as traditionally masculine,

these performances then influence queer cultural capital and affect subsequent performances of many queer people.

Because of this corporate manipulation of identity, protest must again become deeply personal in that those in the community must discern for themselves what is genuine representation and what is working for profit. Bourdieu writes,

We have to refuse the dichotomy between, on the one hand, the aim of arriving at an objective ‘reality’, independent of individual consciousness and wills’, by breaking with common representations of the social world . . . and, on the other hand, the aim of grasping not ‘reality’, but agents’ representations of it, which are the whole reality of the social world conceived ‘as will and representation’. (483)

Queer people, especially those whose identities are more marginalized than others such as women of color and transgender people, must stay informed on the workings of corporations in order to choose where to put their money. This, too, can serve as a form of protest; however, it is not a disruption but rather an understanding of the dominant system. Arjun Appadurai explains, “[d]emand can be manipulated by direct political appeals, whether in the special form of appeals to boycott lettuce grown in bad labor conditions or in the generalized form of protectionism, either ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’” (33). By directing consumer attention towards queer-run businesses and business that advocate for queer issues, these types of companies become more and more in demand and encourage other businesses to follow suit. As gay bars and clubs begin to fail due to gentrification, it becomes more and more important to support local queer-run businesses in order to maintain queer establishments. Appadurai further explains, “Since commodities constantly spill beyond the boundaries of specific cultures (and thus of

specific regimes of value), such political control of demand is always threatened with disturbance” (57). By influencing demand, queer people can begin to gain back some of the control lost to portrayals in advertising.

By refusing to support companies that engage in exploitative and manipulative advertising without genuine interest or support of queer identities, queer people can then gain some control in these portrayals in a way described by Jack Halberstam as, “a radical form of masochistic passivity that not only offers up a critique of the organizing logic of agency and subjectivity itself, but also opts out of certain systems built around a dialectic between colonizer and colonized” (*The Queer Art of Failure* 131). The erasure of the disruptive nature of queer embodiment removes this disruption from queer habitus and taste, making the counter-culture begin to blend with the dominant one. By refusing to participate in this erasure though, queer people can re-establish this disruptiveness. Ralston and Whightsel explain, “[d]isorientation allows queer discourse communities to respond and speak up to normative constructions of being that seek to erase their differences in such a way so that queer subjects can carve out spaces of inhabitancy that are as resilient as they are alliable but most importantly heard” (216). In regaining influence over how queer people are portrayed, queer people start to regain more control over queer habitus and taste. Supporting companies with genuine interest in queer issues allows those companies to make disruptions on their levels, but one must first have trust in that company, which is hard to do in an untrustworthy system. This also places a burden upon queer people to do research before making decisions about what companies to support. Similarly, it is a privilege to be able to choose not to buy certain brands if they are the cheapest to consume, so once again, only those who can afford to cut out certain

brands can truly participate in this type of protest; however, awareness of this manipulation and exploitation provides an opportunity for critique. Even without being able to participate in boycotts, awareness allows queer people to openly critique these companies, to write about them and raise awareness of their practices. In writing and intervention, we come back to disruptive practice. By bringing these issues to the attention of the wider public, we push back against the commodification of queer identities.

Through gentrification, capitalism has begun not only to further shrink the number of physical queer spaces of gathering, making it hard for queer people to meet each other in person, it has also restricted access to existing spaces to those who can afford to frequent these gentrified establishments. Namely white, upper/middle-class, cisgendered men. Through media and advertising, capitalism has also been able to restrict who is visible and therefore has influence over trends of embodiment. In controlling these major cultural points, capitalism has gained influence of queer taste and habitus, making them less disruptive to the dominant culture, and while queer people can choose to be aware of what companies are genuinely supportive and which ones are exploiting queer identities, it is still a privilege that many queer people do not have to choose to boycott and attempt to influence demand; however, by using social media, and writing, and our voices, we may still resist the influence of the dominant culture.

The queer community is fundamentally a community of individuals, and it is a community inherently and historically built on protest. This community of protest has evolved into something much more embodied, and some would argue that in doing so, has lost the core value of disruption. However, through individual identity and

performance and through purposefully holding corporations accountable, the queer community can remain one of disruption, just in a more personal and nuanced way. Queer habitus must remain in tension between “acceptance” and commodification. In fostering an awareness of queer habitus, queer people are able to understand when our own culture is being commodified, and in this tension, we can continue to disrupt restrictive and harmful normative practices. This core of disruption can never truly be erased from queer habitus because it is where queer people find community and therefore it is at the very core of queer identity.

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