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A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Queer Appropriation in Digital Spaces

Derek Bryant

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF QUEER APPROPRIATION IN DIGITAL SPACES

By

Derek Viruez Bryant

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Derek Bryant

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Emma Bloomfield, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Chair

Rebecca Rice, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Donovan Conley, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Sheila Bock, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate College

Abstract

Appropriation is an invariable part of the way in which people communicate. In order to better understand what appropriation is and how appropriation functions communicatively, this research defines what appropriation is from a rhetorical perspective. As the world becomes more interconnected through the use of popular social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, the popularity of appropriation only continues to grow. This research focuses on popular examples of how queer culture is appropriated and used within mainstream culture by straight individuals as a way for to gain financial and social capital.

Keywords: Appropriation, pop culture, digital spaces, TikTok, YouTube, queer studies

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With the interconnectedness of the world comes more than just the ability to engage with different cultures and people across vast distances instantly, it also carries the complex relationship of communication and the underlying aspects of power and privilege that are part of all communicative actions. One use of communication I am interested in is appropriation. When people think of appropriation, they often imagine overt, exploitative borrowing from nondominant cultures, but appropriation can also be considered a fundamental part of communication—intentional or not. I define appropriation as the act of an individual or organization taking a cultural marker, such as a symbol, identity, phrase, etc., that does not belong to them and using it in a way that it was not intended and/or using it without explicit authorization or permission.

Appropriation is a concept that has garnered a variety of engagement in scholarly literature. As I will address in my literature review, some scholars argue that all uses of language are appropriated and therefore it is a natural part of communication, and other scholars argue that society has come to a point that is so connected that it is impossible to hold acts of appropriation accountable. Alternatively, my research acknowledges appropriation is common and all around us, potentially escaping unnoticed, but that does not mean that it holds no relevance or power. It is the exact opposite. The act of appropriating culture can be benign and even potentially beneficial, but it can also be used as a way to gain power or status within today's world, for both dominant and nondominant groups. Among the various types of cultural markers that can be appropriated, I am specifically interested in appropriation as it relates to the circulation and commodification of queer culture in online spaces.

To explain queer appropriation with a contemporary example, Netflix recently received criticism for streaming a comedy special called “Dave Chappelle: The Closer,” in which Chappelle makes derogatory jokes about trans women (Cohen, 2021). Among other problematic features of the special, Chappelle calls himself a TERF, or a “trans-exclusionary radical feminist.” TERFs, as their names suggests, do not consider trans women to be women and thus excludes them from feminist activism. Instead of taking the comedy special down, Netflix stood its ground and supported Chappelle and his negative remarks toward the LGBTQ+ community (Cohen, 2021).

Despite this support for a self-proclaimed TERF and risking alienating some of its viewers, Netflix has no issue with simultaneously appropriating queer culture as a way to gain more money, status, and relevancy. For example, Netflix has a Twitter account @Most that focuses on promoting the queer content that Netflix has to offer. Netflix also created a YouTube series that features popular drag queens Trixie Mattel and Katya watching and reacting to Netflix content. As of October 2021, “I Like to Watch” with Mattel and Katya has over 50 videos and over 5 million views (Netflix, 2021). The popularity of this YouTube series even led to Netflix creating a United Kingdom version that has 17 videos following the same format.

Netflix also creates original queer and LGBTQ+ content that features people that are part of the LGBTQ+ community as lead roles and cover LGBTQ+-related topics and content. “Sex Education,” “Orange is the New Black,” “Special,” “Q-force,” and the reboot of “Queer Eye: More than a Makeover” are just a few of the queer friendly series that Netflix promotes and makes available at the same time it supports content like Chappelle’s “The Closer.” Even within the app, Netflix has a specific tab for queer-related content. This hypocrisy of simultaneously appropriating queer culture and promoting content that is anti-LGBTQ+ can have multiple

explanations. Netflix, as a content provider, may consider itself "neutral" to the content available on its platform and may be interested in providing diversified content to garner as many subscribers, and thus profit, as possible. While Netflix and its content creation is not my focus within this paper, it is a useful example to emphasize that this appropriation of queer culture is consistently happening within digital spaces and how organizations used queerness to gain social and finical capital. In addition to consider the dynamics of media, social media, and capitalism around queer appropriation, I am interested in the rhetorical dynamics, nuances, and dimensions of queer appropriation as potentially exploitative and harmful, but also potentially beneficial and supportive. In other words, this thesis asks, what are the social, political, and economic ramifications of queer appropriation and culture?

Although the Internet creates opportunities for appropriation that are fluid, dynamic, and hard to rigidly define, I ultimately argue that appropriation can be explored and evaluated online through the lens of the "ally" and the "accomplice." The Indigenous Action Media group (IAM) developed the framework of the ally and the accomplice to discuss people who appropriate Indigenous culture and act as "[W]hite saviors" without actually supporting or taking risks for Indigenous advocacy. The "ally" is a false supporter who sees advocacy as temporary and allyship as currency for their own benefit (IAM, 2014). The ally gains social and financial capital from taking advantage of subordinate groups through their performance of allyship that only focus on issues that are beneficial to themselves (IAM, 2014). Alternatively, the "accomplice" is someone who is willing to listen and center the communities they are attempting to help (while de-centering themselves), willing to risk the comfortability of privilege, and actively work at creating change in both social circles and systems of power that subordinate groups do not have access to (IAM, 2014). Adapting this framework to queer appropriation, enables me to evaluate

when queer culture is being monetized and exploited with little to no benefit or support for queer rights (appropriative allyship) or when queer appropriation provides support and is done as a vehicle for advocacy and "direct action" (IAM, 2014). I also draw from literature in feminist rhetorical theory and rhetorical strategies of subordinate groups to complement the ally/accomplice framework. This combined approach to appropriation, informed by communication theory and the voices of marginalized communities, centers the rhetorical dynamics of borrowing identity markers and the roles of power and privilege in appropriative acts.

These conversations around queer appropriation are necessary in light of the continued discrimination and harm that the community faces. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw direct lines of causality between media coverage and violence toward the queer community, Kathleen J. Fitzgerald (2017) argued that "increasing visibility can result in 'othering,' and the sensationalization of gender nonconformity in the media can result in a conservative backlash and increasing violence against transgender people" (p. 56). While large organizations and non-queer individuals profit from queerness, LGBTQ+ individuals around the world still face discrimination, violence, and othering, caused, at least in part, by increase attention, visibility, and awareness. On a large-scale view, same-sex relationships and acts are completely illegal in 67 countries—69 if the data includes countries that laws do not explicitly state they are against same-sex partners but have laws that are often applied to them (Mendos et al., 2020). In the countries that same-sex relationships are legal, only 28 of them allow queer couples to get married (Mendos et al., 2020).

This lack of support for the LGBTQ+ community make them easy targets due to their lack of protection. For example, with Iraq being usurped by the Taliban, queer people are being

tortured and killed to send a message to other queer people (Wakefield, 2021). Similar things are happening in Syria due to ISIS control; LGBTQ+ people are being murdered, raped, and tortured because they are queer (Milton, 2021). These injustices still exist in the United States as well. Every two days a trans woman is murdered; siblings, Jeffrey "JJ" Bright, a 16-year-old transgender boy, and Jasmine Cannady, a 22-year-old non-binary person, were both killed by their mother on February 22nd (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). All of these people, plus the other victims that go unreported, are being hurt and even killed for simply being who they are (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). These troubling stories and statistics help to center the importance of attending to queer culture and its circulation in digital spaces as an emerging space for queer content and content creators. Queer presence and appropriation are both beneficial and harmful; a rising awareness of queer culture but also backlash from its circulation and perceived prominence poses risks to the community while also making queer culture more normalized and accepted.

How communication circulates online, therefore, can have material effects about what people think, what they think about, what policies they support, and how they interact with queer friends, family, and acquaintances. With the interconnectedness of today's world, the relevance of how people interact and engage with one another is paramount—especially within digital spaces that are constantly evolving. Even seemingly trivial representations online, such as memes, can have meaningful social and political impacts (Woods & Hahner, 2019). The influence that memes, pop culture, and social media have over human society is widespread (e.g., Davi, 2007; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). Sharing memes and participating in digital communities related to queer culture can carry with it a type of social currency as the latest progressive "trend" (IAM, 2014). In sum, there is money to be made from capitalizing on being

queer or using queer culture within mainstream media and social currency to be gained from participating and sharing in queer culture.

In the following sections, I trace important literature in appropriation and digital rhetoric. I then describe my methodology and preview the subsequent chapters that explore queer appropriation in music videos (Chapter 2) and social media (Chapter 3). Ultimately, I am interested in the power dynamics inherent in appropriation and exploring the variety of ways that our symbolic engagements with culture and capitalism influence participation in and the consequences of appropriation. Appropriation serves many purposes and can be used both intentionally and unintentionally, so I will be analyzing a wide array of appropriative communication that includes harmful consequences of non-LGBTQ+ individuals using queer culture for their own advantage and the dynamics within culture-sharing and disseminating by members of queer culture. Appropriation within digital spaces in inevitable due to the way that the internet functions; however, through the responsible and ethical use of queer content online and becoming an accomplice instead of an ally, queer people can benefit from online content creation by being compensated correctly and creating accomplices that can join the fight for queer rights.

What is Appropriation?

One of the most common definitions of appropriation is the taking of behaviors, language, fashion, and other cultural markers from nondominant racial and ethnic groups (Rogers, 2006). To better understand this process, Richard A. Rogers (2006) proposes a typology of four different types of racial and cultural appropriation: 1) exchange; 2) domination; 3) exploitation; and 4) transculturation. Cultural exchange is the assumption that all cultures can share and borrow from each other with relatively equal access to power and privilege. This is a

highly idealized version of appropriation that overlooks and downplays the power dynamics inherent in acts of appropriation. Cultural domination is a forced type of appropriation where the person or groups in power forces the non-domination group to adopt their culture—such as during colonization. Under cultural dominance, individuals in the subordinate culture may participate in in this dominance "for resistive ends" (p. 478). In cultural exploitation, features of a subordinated culture are subsumed by the dominant culture without "substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation" (p. 477).

The last type of appropriation Rogers outlines is transculturation, which is a way to think about appropriation as a relational phenomenon, where the interconnectedness of society makes identifying single origin points for culture difficult. According to the author, "The challenge for cultural, critical media, critical rhetorical, and intercultural communication studies is to reconceptualize culture not as a bounded entity and essence but as radically relational or dialogic" (Rogers, 2006, p. 499). Rogers ultimately proposes theorizing appropriation toward a transcultural perspective, where appropriation can be seen in everyday interactions that are stretched across borders and cultures. While the first three terms are important in understanding the different types of appropriation, I want to dig deeper into Rogers' (2006) idea of "transculturation" for the current study. Rogers' (2006) defines transculturation as:

> cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic, for example, multiple cultural appropriations structured in the dynamics of globalization and transnational capitalism creating hybrid forms. (p. 477)

As the world has become more connected and globalized, with the rise of the internet and the ability to interact with most cultures from around the world, the line of where something came

from becomes blurred. Rogers defines this process as a "cultural hybrid," or where multiple cultural forms come together and become interwoven with each other.

To make things more complex, cultural hybrids can form with other cultural forms to make something completely new, thereby showing that an original or pure culture or cultural form is nearly impossible to trace to its origins (Rogers, 2006). While a transcultural approach to appropriation can be a beneficial view in eliminating essentialism and recognizing the complexities of our current moment, I advocate that appropriative interactions are necessarily bound by power dynamics and that the differentiation of dominant and subordinate cultures is still possible and important to identify. Globalization does make it more difficult to figure out where cultural forms come from and the resultant power dynamics therein, however, it is not impossible. By stating that there is no way to trace back where something comes from, it can potentially excuse the power behind appropriation and reaffirm the equalizing of cultural exchange as power neutral or irrelevant. This point of view can be potentially dangerous because it gives a free pass for others to appropriate culture without any repercussions or even permission to do so without being labeled appropriation. Ultimately, if one chooses to believe that it is impossible to trace back the source of what they are taking from, then there leaves no real reason or consequences to find it, or not find it. I fear that the transculturation model may enable or legitimize people in positions of power to grab and take from whatever culture they want because there is no consequence for doing so, thereby restricting the already limited agency of disadvantaged groups to resist and challenge appropriation.

When this article was written fifteen years ago, Rogers (2006) states that transculturation is largely caused by globalization, neocolonialism, and transnational capitalism. While this list is still accurate, I would also add the popularity of social media and the Internet as technologies

that encourages transculturation of cultural symbols and artifacts. Within five minutes of going through social media, we are able to interact with a huge number of cultures and ideas. A social media feed is an amalgamation of perspectives, cultures, and ideas that are all created through people who can be found around the world. While this borrowing of cultures is an exciting and potentially democratizing force, it does not excuse appropriation or fully erase power dynamics, which are potentials risks in a transculturation perspective. Similar to how people's intellectual property is easily accessible, but there are still things like copyright and rules against plagiarism that protects the value this intellectual property holds, I believe there needs to be more value on the concept of appropriation as taking, copying, and manipulating cultures in digital spaces. The Internet and social media provide additional channels through which we can examine the proliferation and circulation of appropriative acts, the various forms they take, purposes they might serve, and impacts that they have.

In order to expand Rogers's typology to digital rhetorical spaces and consider other approaches to appropriation, it is important to analyze concrete examples of appropriation and how it has been viewed as acts of dominance, exploitation, but also resistance. Circling back to Rogers' (2006) idea that appropriation is a relational phenomenon, Dawkins (2005) engages racial appropriation through the concept of "passing," which Rogers would likely categorize as appropriation dominance but performed for resistive purposes. In an attempt to pass and become a part of the dominant (White) culture, passers directly engage with hegemonic society as a way to gain control and attempt to gain an advantage within society—or even survive within a society that was not built for them. People of color are constantly fighting against a White supremacist society through the institutional structures that are created from the dominant population (Johnson, 2001). They essentially appropriate the way that others act around them as a method

for survival and resistance. These people must become masters at stepping between the black world and the White world while also navigating their own identity as fluid.

While Dawkins focuses on race, groups marginalized on the basis of sexuality can also participate in resistive appropriation to adopt features of the dominant culture to fit into mainstream society. According to Morris' (2002) examination of sexuality: "A secret of dangerous difference motivates some to develop and sustain a double-consciousness in order to survive amid and sometimes to resist dominant, oppressive cultural practices" (p. 230). Applying DuBois's term of "double consciousness" to the experiences of gay men, Morris points to similarities in marginalized groups relationships to dominant culture across race and sexuality. People who do not fit within societal expectations have to find ways to fit in, thereby actively participating in cultural dominance so as not to alienate themselves and thereby avoid risks. For example, a queer man can dress more masculine to appear straight, or a Black man can wear a suit and tie to avoid being seen as "dangerous" or "unprofessional." Similarly, Dawkins (2005) states that "Structures cannot be separated from human behavior, and larger circumstances can be changed by recursive routine actions" (p. 3), meaning that these behaviors, however necessary to survive, will thereby reinforce and support power structures currently in place, such as the patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity.

Oppressive systems reinforce ideas of what it means to be normal and acceptable. When a queer person assimilates into mainstream culture, they become more acceptable or palatable by "playing straight" and are thus not considered as deviant as other queer men that do not assimilate into straight life (Warner, 1999). In Rogers' (2006) second categorization of cultural appropriation, cultural dominance, he talks about how individuals have the ability to resist

cultural domination through the use of appropriation. These ideas are similar to Shugart's (1997) who defines the idea of feminist rhetorical appropriation as

> a process by which traditional and/or culturally popular stories, songs, myths, rituals, legends, fables, and icons that advance a traditional, oppressive ideology of gender are referenced clearly in such a way that the messages apparent in the new text challenge those traditional conceptions of gender. (p. 211)

Shugart's conceptualization of resistive appropriation focuses on how power is a part of appropriation and also details strategies for how appropriation can be used as a tool of resistance. A common example of this rhetorical strategy being used is when a deprivileged group reclaims a negative label or a slur, such as the appropriation of the word "queer" from a slur to a community identifier (Shugart, 1997). While appropriation is often considered a tool of dominant groups, these examples show how appropriation can also be a tool wielded by subordinate groups for survival, activism, and progress.

In their article, Bianchi (2014) looks to explain how by using slurs, marginalized groups are engaging in rhetorical appropriation that is "echoic." By having different communities use these slurs, it echoes through them, and it allows for the association of the word to change. Bianchi (2014) states, "targeted members or groups may appropriate their own slurs for non-derogatory purposes, in order to demarcate the group, and show a sense of intimacy and solidarity" (p. 37). It is also important to note that this reclamation does not occur instantly; a community can use a word and it can still have negative associations. Only after continual use will it eventually stabilize into mainstream and common use with a new meaning and association. Other examples of groups' reclaiming slurs can be seen with African Americans reclaiming the N word and women reclaiming words like "bitch" and "slut." The SlutWalk

movement, for example, takes a word that was commonly used to blame and label victims of sexual assault and flip it on its head. The SlutWalk's main purpose is to end victim blaming, slut shaming, and rape culture that is prevalent in mainstream culture. "Bitch" has seen a similar appropriation. For example, women in the music industry such as Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Alanis Morissette, Madonna, and Lily Allen, among others, have used the word with a positive connotation. Lily Allen's song "Hard Out Here," for example, appropriates the song "It's Hard out Here for a Pimp" by DJay by replacing the word "pimp" with "bitch." Allen's music video parodies common hip-hop video tropes as a way to call out the sexism that is normalized within the music industry.

Although not using the language of "appropriation," other scholars have pointed out similar rhetorical strategies in progressive movements challenging systems of power. These are relevant to my research because I aim to expand upon Rogers's categorization by re-inserting power dynamics and recognizing the complex interplay between dominant and subordinate groups in contemporary queer appropriation. Adapting Kenneth Burke's idea of the comic frame, Demo (2000) examines the different rhetorical strategies of the Guerilla Girls, including the practice of mimicry. Directly quoting Irigaray (1977/1985), Demo (2000) notes that, "mimicry works by demonstrating the impropriety of 'a masculine logic' that defines women in univocal terms. The challenge involved in mimicry, then, is to expose the incongruity of a normative standard without being 'reduced to it'" (p. 141). In a way, this mimicry can be seen as a form of appropriation because it is a way of reproducing inequality that shows how ridiculous it is, but still being able to be taken seriously. The group, the Guerrilla Girls, perform an echoic reclaiming of the word "girl"—which can often be used pejoratively to infantilize adult women.

This reclamation allows the group to use sexuality and binaries as a way to point out how women are not always treated seriously or with respect.

Continuing with themes of rhetorical appropriation and feminism, Shugart, Egley Waggoner, and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) explore how the media uses juxtaposition and appropriation as a way to control feminism to serve the dominant ideology. According to them:

> [the] means by which this appropriation is accomplished is an aesthetic code of juxtaposition, which occurs under the guise of the established postmodern techniques of pastiche and eclecticism, characterized by random, incoherent images and/or codes of signification that serve to deconstruct meaning. In this manner, messages of resistance are coopted, commodified, and sold to audiences as a ‘‘genuine imitation’’—something whose code appears strikingly similar to the resistant discourse but, by virtue of strategic repositioning, is rendered devoid of challenge. (Shugart et al., 2001, pp. 197-198)

Shugart and colleagues note that while there may be more representation of feminism and feminist ideas in the media, their performance is still under the power of the patriarchy. Thus, representations of feminism in the media can only operate as progressive as far as the patriarchy allow them to operate as such. This enables dominant ideas to maintain control over feminist ideals that look to dismantle the power that the patriarchy has. Ultimately, "postmodern media occur in a political-economic context that ultimately serves dominant interests" (Shugart et al., 2001, p. 206). In this sense, resistive appropriation can be ineffective within media and fail to challenge the systems in place that produce and circulate content.

Consequently, increased representation in the media for marginalized and nondominant groups is not always positive. For example, shows like Queer Eye appear to be progressive by including queer voices, yet still center the message of the show around a straight man

(Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). The show is not allowed to be "too gay" in fear of ostracizing itself from mainstream popularity, but still takes advantage of queer culture to appeal to diverse audiences (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). According to the authors, "while Queers are now permitted access to the media mainstream, they are welcome there only so long as they observe certain limits imposed upon them by the conventions of the mainstream's heterosexist sociosexual order" (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006, p. 427). Operating within these confines as set by the dominant culture make it much more challenging to effectively create change (Shugart et al., 2001).

Bostdorff and Goldzwig (2005) discuss juxtaposition as a dominant rhetorical strategy in their article about how former President Regan appropriated the collective memory of Martin Luther King Jr. to claim that race was no longer an issue in America. They state that: "collective memory includes a selective appropriation of the past by the multiple publics inspired by historical imagination" (Bostdorff & Goldzwig, 2005, p. 664). In his own speeches, Reagan looked to appropriate King's rhetoric by quoting him. This appropriation was exploitative because President Regan used an icon of the Civil Rights movement to argue that racial equality had already been established in the United States, counter to King's values. By taking King's words out of context, it allowed Reagan to appropriate the public memory of King without any real consequences due to his position of power and the conditions of the rhetorical situation. King was tokenized through rhetorical appropriation to represent civil rights and the Black community writ large as being in alignment with Reagan's policy goals. King's words were appropriated to show that racism was over; his memory was used as a tool to push a message that was, at the least, not accurate, and, at the worst, disrespectful to King's memory. Additionally, this act of appropriation shows how appropriation involves selections and deflections (Burke,

1966), which are rhetorical choices of what to take from a community and what can be strategically left out. For example, the peaceful, "managerial" aspects of King's legacy are remembered (selected), while his more radical, confrontational activism is forgotten (deflected) (Johnson, 2018). In terms of queer appropriation, only the socially acceptable aspects of queerness are taken and put on display and other aspects are deflected as a way to cater to heteronormativity (Warner, 2000).

While much literature on appropriation focuses on how groups that live in different societal levels of power appropriate each other, Anspach et al. (2007) looked to examine appropriation between subordinate groups. The researchers coined the term lateral appropriation which is defined as one marginalized group using the other as a way to gain more power. In order to illustrate this term, they look specifically at how the atheist community appropriates the language of the LGBTQ+ community and the meaning behind coming out of the closet as a way to gain an advantage both socially and politically. This is because:

> atheists have instead strategically appropriated the closet metaphor in a largely political attempt to raise awareness of, and organize around, their experiences as a marginalized group in the United States (Anspach et al., 2007, p. 103)

By appropriating this metaphor from the queer community, atheists were able to use the meaning behind the metaphor to position themselves as oppressed and marginalized due to the metaphor being well known and used in the same way for the queer community. It is important to note that, "while the high-status group or individual may choose in passing to stylize themselves in the language or social practices of the subordinate group, in the mouths of the subordinated the same language may leave them stigmatized and/or marginalized" (Anspach et al., 2007, p. 98). Take, for example, arguably lateral appropriation between straight White women and the queer

community. While it may be trendy for a bridal shower party to celebrate at a gay bar, those women can leave not fearing the fact that they might get followed out and beaten for being gay. Katy Perry can say "wig" during an episode of *American Idol* repeatedly to a gay contestant, but that same gay contestant can be seen as too flamboyant or bullied if he says queer slang too much. Appropriation is a powerful tool that often involves power dynamics; what is okay for one group to say or do may not be for members of another group. Even within subordinate groups borrowing from one another, it is nearly impossible to escape the influences of intersectionality and the ways that different marginalized identities experience oppression. Lateral appropriation could be a useful concept to analyze how gay culture often takes from African American culture, which could be a meaningful extension of this project in my future work.

Taking a different approach to seeing appropriation as heavily involved in power dynamics, some scholars see appropriation as a daily, almost harmless facet of a communal society. Analyzing appropriation through the use of Shakespearean texts, Christy (2014) defined appropriation as "a dialogical phenomenon—not simply a conversation or collaboration between appropriating and source texts, but an exchange that involves both sharing and contested ownership" (p. 42). They state that simply engaging in conversation or using language is appropriation, both in the traditional form of stealing and in their created definition of giving and taking, because all language is communally created by others.

Christy (2014) specifically analyzes *mimesis*, mimicry within literature, as a form of appropriation in the book called *Recycling Shakespeare* by Charles Marowitz. Marowitz's book takes direct quotes from Shakespeare plays and rearranges them without adding any text to create new plotlines. Although attribution has been given, Marowitz is still appropriating Shakespeare by taking his words and repurposing them for different uses without explicit permission. For

Christy (2014), this is an illustrative example of how all language is appropriative, because language is constantly copied and reproduced by others. This occurs across power dynamics as different groups borrow and use the language of others, which could be characterized by Rogers (2006) as cultural exchange.

Under this definition, appropriation is a major part of communication and how it functions, including my current appropriation of Christy's words, ostensibly without permission, for the purposes of my own argument-building. All academic works, in this sense, are full of other people's thoughts, ideas, and words have been appropriated from others. While I agree with Christy's (2014) claims that appropriation, broadly defined, is a communicative process that is relational and a natural aspect of the way in which we communicate, I do not think appropriation should be written off as unharmful due to its frequency or ease. Similar to my disagreement with Rogers, I do not wish to conflate pervasiveness with tacit acceptance. Rogers' concept of transculturation and Christy's perspectives tell us important things about culture and language, and how they are operating throughout communicative acts in a globalized world. I wish to add to these explorations of the pervasiveness of appropriation by encouraging the continued interrogation of the power dynamics and sources of certain types of appropriation, including the potentially harmful and exploitative, as well as the benign and beneficial.[1]

Appropriation is more than Kim Kardashian wearing box braids; it is foundational to the communication process. It can be unintentional, as in the daily use of language, but it can also be intentional in the borrowing of others' cultures for economic gain. Appropriation is not a static idea that only functions in one way, but it is a dynamic and complex communicative action that functions differently depending on the context that it is placed in. For this reason, I wish to

[1] this is a topic that has garnered much attention in other disciplines, including folklore studies, anthropology, and law (Jackson, 2021; Ziff & Rao, 1997).

employ a rhetorical approach to understand these communicative dynamics. By a rhetorical approach, I mean attending to the symbolic choices made in language, visuals, arrangement, presentation, and channel during the appropriation of queer culture in digital spaces. I will elaborate further on the rhetorical theories informing my analysis in the methods section. In the next section, I explore literature related to the artifacts I have selected in terms of pop culture, digital rhetoric, and queer theory.

Pop Culture, Digital Rhetoric, and Queer Theory

In this section, I will be looking at literature related to popular culture as it is spread through digital rhetoric and in media. With the rise of the Internet and popularity of connecting through various social media networks, multimodal cultural forms like memes have become an important aspect of both popular culture as well as communication studies. While some scholars might still be dubious about the importance of memes, Davi (2007) states, "the meme is in itself a valuable methodological tool that is particularly suited to the analysis of popular culture discourses that transform social practices in spite of their apparent superficiality and triviality" (p. 28). This is seen when a simple phrase, picture, or even dance move becomes infused with meaning—a meaning that was given to it from its circulation, copying, and reinterpretation online. The Internet is virtually infinitely expanding and creates cycles of popularity and engagement. For example, the Brady Bunch was once a hit in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it was brought back to contemporary circulation when clips of Jan and Marsha Brady began being used as reaction gifs. Using these clips today can be seen as appropriating the culture from the past and reusing it in a modern context, with contemporary users potentially not even knowing the source, per transculturation, but valuing it for the ability to share certain emotions and reactions as a gif.

When a meme is used in unison with the rhetorical tool of the ideograph, Davi (2007) argues that it can help illustrate the feelings of the public:

> The memetic perspective shifts the critic's attention from forceful language terms (or recurrent visual forms) to cultural entities that replicate, including behaviors and material artifacts. The question of rhetorical force becomes an empirical question: successful memes are selected for (they must get our attention), and they replicate by altering cultural environments so as to increase their own chances of survival. (p. 40)

The format of how the meme survives, through being rapidly replicated, lends itself to being an important aspect of appropriation within modern media. A meme can be replicated, shared, and changed to stay relevant so that many may not even understand where the meme originally came from. This idea of expansion can relate back to the ideas that appropriation is not always obvious or even intentional. While this replication and sharing of a meme may have no negative or positive intent, except to make someone else laugh, the social ramifications may reach much further than intended depending on the content and group being appropriated.

Social media is one of the most important and commonly used forms of communication when it comes to the younger population. In order to better understand the impact and power that social media holds, Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2021) examined how political interests can be communicated through popular social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. These different platforms are "connect[ed] to an assumed likeminded audience through the use of shared symbolic resources" (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021, p. 2). Users on different social media platforms assume this similarity because the people that they are interacting with also share a similar message, politically speaking. These communication channels, such as private messaging, commenting, liking, and sharing, can be seen as both

layered and complex due to the many interactions that are happening all at once and at different times.

According to the authors, “when enacted through social media, collective political expression can be seen as a hybrid between interpersonal communication (with known others) and broadcasting to a large (unknown) audience” (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021, p. 2). If an account is public, it can allow for anyone online to view the content and then potentially increase the content’s ability to be circulated. It is also important to note that different associations with different social media platforms allow for different conversations and attitudes about each one. For example, Literat and Kliger-Vilenchik (2021) found that people did not associate Facebook with politics, so they often avoided talking about politics on that specific social media platform. Each social media platform has different assumptions about what kind of content would be on them and the appropriate interactions between users, which are referred to as affordances. For example, TikTok has a “duet” feature that encourages riffing off other people’s videos by putting theirs and the one you are recording in a split screen. This affordance of the platform enables direct interaction and responses to others’ content.

This thesis looks examines queer appropriation within online spaces, so it is important to understand how the online environment affects queer culture and communities. In a study conducted by MacAulay and Moldes (2016), they stated that digital spaces allow for the mistreatment of queer people in the form of trolling, bullying, and oppressive practices such as Facebook’s real name policy. This is a policy that locked drag queens out of their Facebook accounts because they did not set up Facebook pages that matched their legal name. While negatively impacting drag queens, this policy also affected queer people who are transgender or no longer go by their legal name because it does not fit their gender identity. While the internet

can provide spaces for queer people to interact with one another (e.g., Bloomfield, 2018; Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles; Raun, 2016), they can also be spaces that are harmful or dangerous.

It is impossible to deny that the representation of queer people has increased within traditional and digital media. Sumerau (2019) specifically looks at the increase of transgender representation within media. While people that are part of these underrepresented communities may welcome the idea of increased visibility due to potential benefits of aligning with dominant culture, increased representation can also cause negative effects through stereotyping. A prominent example of this is the "gay best friend" trope where the lead female character in a television show or movie will have a gay sidekick who is often a hyperbole of flamboyant personality traits. While this character increases gay representation, the character is also reproducing and reinforcing stereotypes about how gay men act.

These negative stereotypes can also be seen with transgender representation because according to Sumerau (2019), people experience "confusion, shock, and anger at increased transgender visibility, and often seek to make sense of this shift by labeling transgender populations and experiences as new, negative, unwelcome, or even dangerous" (p. 26). People are hesitant to change and can react strongly to increased presence. As stated before, it is difficult to draw direct causality between media representations and off-screen violence. However, Sumerau (2019), along with Fitzgerald (2017), suggests that increased transgender visibility may cause cultural backlash. Despite these risks, Sumerau (2019) ultimately conclude that increased representation of the trans community in movies, television shows, and on the front cover of popular magazines, can help make positive change toward trans acceptance. It would be a mistake, however, to conflate all representation with positive representation or all representation

with acceptance. Media representation does not mean that homophobia, transphobia, and hierarchy is suddenly gone. Indeed, these hierarchies may often find different ways to manifest itself within media and pop culture, such as appropriation, which seems to celebrate queer culture but does not necessarily support it.

When analyzing queer appropriation online, it is important to be informed by queer theory and scholarship. There is power in the way that gender and sexuality are discussed and shown within mainstream media and it is important to feature the voices of queer scholars and in queer scholarship. Similar to cultural appropriation, queer theory is interested in blurred categories, inverting expectations, and challenging norms: Chávez (2007) states, "Because of queer theory's insistence on 'queering' boundaries, binaries, and language usage, it is easy to see how this tool can uncover meanings in language that were unlikely to be the speaker or writer's intention" (p. 270). From song lyrics to a description of a YouTube video, words have power in all forms. The world is constructed from a heteronormative perspective, and the words we use can be an example of that (Rand, 2013). By addressing and announcing this power before the analysis of my artifacts, and as someone who has experienced this imbalance before, I will constantly take this notion into account. Rand (2013) states that:

> queer critical rhetoric might examine previously overlooked queer objects, but in doing so, it also reveals the blind spots of analysis—both inadvertent and intentional—and forces a recalibration of theories that previously have rendered such objects invisible, inconsequential, or irrelevant… When we use those tools in a manner unforeseen or to examine an object unexpected, we may find that the tool itself is also perpetually transformed (read: bent, twisted, converted, recruited, revolutionized, queered) through the encounter. (p. 534)

Along these lines, I hope to create new conversations about the rhetorical effects of not just queer appropriation, but appropriation of all kinds and see how our evaluative tools and rhetorical methodologies must be adapted, twisted, and "queered" to accommodate certain topics and channels. Through taking something as simple and overlooked as a TikTok trend, I am able to examine the rhetorical effects of taking something queer and turning it into a commodified trend that is absent of its initial purpose and meaning. Even looking at digital spaces through a critical and queer perspective, I am able to examine and engage with digital rhetoric in a way that prompts reflection on our critical tools and how rhetoric functions online.

This study is interested in understanding the barriers which are created through normalizing straight culture as the way of being or the natural way that one exists and in "excavat[ing] productive moments of queer worldmaking" (West, 2013, p. 538) which West refers to as reparative criticism. Throughout this paper, I am showing how prevalent and important queerness and queer culture is to mainstream media and content creation. By picking out and explaining how artifacts are queer and/or created by queer people, it adds to this worldmaking by giving credit to those queer folk who deserve it most. I am purposely showing how even though it may be mainstream, which is dominated by "norms and normativity (West, 2013, p. 540), there is also queerness within it. Through taking the time and effort of sorting out the messiness of the Internet and the artifacts, I am explaining not just the need to examine queer artifacts, but also for the importance of recognizing and celebrating queer worldmaking.

I also build upon Calafell and Nakayama's (2016) work about queer theory. One of the most important aspects of their work is the understanding that identity is socially constructed as a way to meet certain goals (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). Queer people understand this because often the identities that are constructed for us do not fit with how we see ourselves. It is simply a

way to keep queerness disciplined within a society that does not value it. This is why the idea of understanding what normativity is and how this idea of normal came about is very important; resisting normativity, heteronormativity, and hegemony is an important part of queer theory (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016). Aspects of society that are considered normal, such as sex, sexuality, and gender, are constantly changing throughout history as well as geographically. Queer theory works to remain identity as a tool of progress instead of a tool of oppression (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016).

The use and reclamation of the word "queer" is also foundational within queer theory because it is taking something negative and reimaging it in a way that is more inclusive to those who fall under the queer umbrella, an example of Bianchi's (2014) "echoic" appropriation. The word queer is now a term that does not create a binary or gay and straight, but one where identity is complex and constantly changing. As Calafell and Nakayama (2016) point out, "Queer embraces whatever is nonnormative. In this sense it is anti-essentialist, as it does not claim any essential, underlying character to the various categories of sexual identity" (p. 1). Queer as a term is inclusive of transgender people, gender non-conforming individuals, and even those who are questioning where they fit. Even asexual people who are in straight relationship still fit within this queer category because the way they view sexuality is different than the traditional heteronormative sense.

Queer theory is also interested in researching "legal, political, religious, and other institutional discourses that create and reproduce these categories and the assumptions lurking behind these constructed categories" (Calafell & Nakayama, 2016, p. 3). These normative and institutional discourses of heteronormativity circulate in digital spaces to reinforce gender binaries, heterosexuality, and discipline gender norms. For example, the "real name" Facebook

example discussed earlier demonstrates how large media companies and social media platforms have rules and regulations against queer people and thereby regulate what is normal and appropriate online. Through using queer theory in tandem with feminist rhetorical theory with attention to media and popular culture, I am able to analyze how sexuality is constructed and reproduced through the representation of queerness and queer figures within popular culture and on social media platforms.

Calafell and Nakayama (2016) argue that within queer theory, "The question is not whether gay men are 'really' like that, as they are not the object of the study, but how these constructed representations of gay men function to serve some ideologies over others" (p. 3). Similar to Calafell and Nakayama (2016), I am not interested in accuracy, per se, but how appropriated digital representations of queerness support heteronormativity and, conversely, how appropriation may be more progressive and supportive of the culture it borrows from. The circulation of queer stereotypes and the appropriation of queer culture to support homophobia and heteronormativity are harmful to the queer community and reinforce dominant power structures and ideologies. Instead of cloistering the queer community off of the Internet to avoid appropriation, I advocate for a perspective on appropriation that can delineate positive, respectful acts of appropriation from those that are exploitative and harmful.

Feminist Rhetorical Theory

As a way to analyze and interpret forms of appropriation of queer culture, I will be using a feminist rhetorical approach to evaluate if these artifacts support social hierarchies (such as hegemonic masculinity), gives queer communities autonomy through authentic voice, backgrounds the queer community, and/or supports progressive policies that directly affect queer people and with what implications. This feminist rhetorical perspective is informed by Dow's

(1995) approach to analyzing rhetoric for how it challenges, upholds, disrupts, or reinforces social and political hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers. Dow's (1995) feminist rhetorical theory is inherently intersectional because it explores exploitation and oppression of various marginalized groups, not just of women and non-men. From this critical rhetorical feminist perspective, I analyze different artifacts from social media, advertisements, and music videos to get a better understanding of how appropriation, but more specifically queer appropriation functions communicatively and rhetorically within society.

When analyzing digital cultural artifacts, I draw from Plumwood's ideas of feminism, ecofeminism, and backgrounding. From an anthropocentric perspective, nature is thought of as a background to humans. Humans are at the forefront, while nature acts as a backdrop or environment that ultimately serves human interests. Plumwood argues that women and other marginalized communities are often seen in the same way that nature is; women are mothers and wives who live in the background to their husbands and sons. Women are backgrounded by hegemonic ideologies because they are thought of as secondary to men, in the same way that queer people are associated with being secondary to cis straight men. According to Warner (1999), being straight is being normal because it is within the statistical norm. Being queer, on the other hand, is not normal because it is rarer than being straight. Voices and bodies that deviate from the norm are thus silenced, excluded, and relegated to the background, unless their presence is being leveraged to benefit a dominant power. Hegemonic masculinity maintains the status quo that being a man means being a cis straight man, whereas queer men may be backgrounded similar to that of women and nature (Warmer, 1999; Sloop, 2000; Trujillo, 1991).

Although originally applied to women and nature, I use Plumwood's idea of backgrounding to evaluate how queer appropriation online backgrounds queer people, culture,

and symbols. I also draw from Plumwood's (2002) anti-dualist approach that looks to see men and women as both being connected to culture and to nature and these binaries between genders and living beings as constructed and inherently arbitrary. By taking this approach and building from scholars' previous ideas, I analyzed my chosen artifacts based on how they invite harmful, beneficial, or mixed consequences in appropriating queer culture and whether queer culture is centered and supported.

Another way I analyze my artifacts is by seeing if these artifacts contain what Taylor (2013) refers to as an "authentic womanist voice." This voice or perspective looks to fight against traditional social discourses and instead provide one that directly challenges the status quo through valuing marginalized voices as authoritative and valid. This perspective also looks to fight against gatekeeping and "oppressive discourses and constructs that limit access" (Taylor, 2013, p. 44). Through the use of storytelling and personal narratives, authentic womanist voices seek solutions that are productive to the overall community instead of a selected few. If an artifact employs any of these solutions, or does the opposite, this perspective will be effective in determining the potential implications of the artifact for queer culture.

Along these lines, I draw from Trujillo's (1991) five "distinguishing features of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 291), which they used to observe how hegemonic masculinity is further reproduced and maintained within media. The five features are: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiermanship, and heterosexuality. While this article only examines print and television media, these five features can easily be applied to more modern contexts such as YouTube videos and TikTok trends to evaluate if these artifacts are reproducing hegemonic masculinity or dismantling it. Taylor's womanist perspective and Trujillo's five features thus represent challenges and support for hegemony,

respectively, which provide me analytical backing to evaluate various appropriative acts and whether and to what extent they are progressive, resistive, and feminist acts.

I combine these theories from feminist rhetorical theory and queer theory with the aforementioned Indigenous Action Media's (IAM, 2014) ally/accomplice framework. This combination highlights both my theoretical foundation in the communication discipline and the importance of elevating marginalized voices and centering theories from those communities in our scholarship. The distinction between being an ally and an accomplice guides my evaluation of my chosen artifacts. Indigenous Action Media (2014) argues that "In order to commodify struggle it must first be objectified. This is exhibited in how 'issues' are 'framed' & 'branded.' Where struggle is commodity, allyship is currency" (p. 1). This commodity of queer struggle means that people and companies can perform allyship in order to gain real currency and social currency. For example, media including stereotypical queer characters media, popular figures coming out in support of the queer community only to ignore it when there's an actual issue, and temporary logo changes and statements of support that have no real action tied to them. For example, during Pride Month, many companies change their logo to a rainbow version of itself for 30 days as a way to show support for the LGBTQ+ community. This minor, temporary change, however, can be seen as a way to commodify the queer community for financial gain. This is why companies like Sephora, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Cisco, Lenovo, and Bethesda all changed their logo to rainbows on their United States account but failed to do so for their Middle Eastern accounts (Conrad, 2021). While showing support for the LGBQT+ community might garner increased customers in the United States, companies might lose financial support in countries that oppose the queer community. IAM would classify these companies as allies who

are “disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support. The term ally has been rendered ineffective and meaningless” (IAM, 2014, p. 1). Allyship is no longer enough.

Expanding on this weakened notion of allyship, IAM (2014) explains that individuals and organizations often engage in allyship for “notoriety or financial” gain (p. 3). The previously mentioned companies above are a prime example of this. By “supporting” the queer community through performative activism, companies are gaining notoriety in the form of social capital with the LGBTQ+ community as well as their financial support because they are LGBTQ+ friendly. One of the most concerning outcomes of this relationship is that those companies then have the power to platform and choose what queer issues they support and for how long. Due to stigma of certain queer related issues like internalized racism and HIV/AIDS, companies often stay away from important issues such as those that need to be solved (IAM, 2014). What makes it even worse, is that these “allies” feel a sense of entitlement to the community that they associated with–even though they are not a part of the community in the first place and have no real intention of doing difficult work to dismantle the entitlement that they feel towards the community (IAM, 2014).

On the other side of the spectrum is an accomplice. What makes an accomplice different from an ally is their willingness to symbolically get their hands dirty. While an ally might cheer from the sidelines, an accomplice will be in the fight with the community they are supporting. They are challenging people within communities of power that they are a part of as well. Accomplices “listen with respect for the range of cultural practices and dynamics that exist” (IAM, 2014, p. 6). This is a vastly different approach than an ally who will just attach themselves to a community without understanding it and using it for their own benefit. Accomplices are “accountable and responsible to each other” and are active participants in the overall fight to

equality and true understanding, despite potential personal (financial, political, and social) risks (IAM, 2014, p. 6).

In the following chapters, I analyze music videos and social media trends as artifacts of queer appropriation. It is important to note the reason why each artifact was specifically chosen. The main criterion is that all of these artifacts are in the eye of mainstream media. While some examples are more popular than others, all of these artifacts can be easily accessed and have been watched or accessed by hundreds of thousands of people. The artifacts were also chosen to represent different features of allyship and of being an accomplice, per IAM's categorization. While IAM is specifically talking about Indigenous communities, this work can easily be applied to queer communities as well. As a form of lateral appropriation (Anspach et al., 2007), I apply the framework of accomplices and allies to make sense of the various forms of queer appropriation and what rhetorical dynamics distinguish them as useful and productive versus harmful and exploitative.

Artifacts

The artifacts I am analyzing in this thesis will be fragments of discourse (McGee, 1980) from a variety of different digital media outlets that aim to capture various examples of queer appropriation. While it would be nearly impossible to do an exhaustive analysis of such a topic, these examples were selected due to their circulation, channel, and their performance of accomplice or ally features. The two primary categories I will analyze are examples of appropriation from popular music videos and a popular TikTok trend. The variety of channels enables multimodal analysis of images and discourse across platforms with different goals to see the variety of contexts in which appropriation occurs.

The first chapter focuses on appropriating queer culture, public figures, and drag culture in music videos. This type of queer appropriation is frequently seen within music videos, and more specifically pop music videos throughout time. For example, the B-52's music video from 1989, "Love Shack," includes famous drag queen RuPaul Charles. More recently, "We Made You" by Eminem features Derrick Berry dressed in Britney Spears drag. This inclusion can be read as mocking drag culture because Eminem's music features gay slurs and anti-LGBTQ+ messaging.

Rhianna, Kesha, and The Black Eyed Peas' music videos have also featured drag queens that are seen in the back of their videos. Music artists like Iggy Azalea and Taylor Swift heavily feature drag queens within their videos. Azalea's "Sally Walker" and "Started" both have cameos and breaks in the music video that focus on popular drag queens from RuPaul's Drag Race. To highlight features of appropriative allyship, I analyze Taylor Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" music video. Swift—a straight White women—centers herself, literally and rhetorically, around a surfeit of queer figures who are backgrounded in their serving as Swift's accessories. The video ending shows Swift with Katy Perry, another straight White woman who also appropriates queer culture, holding hands as a heart ends the video. While this signifies the end of their feud, it can easily be implied as the two being romantically involved with one another—especially with Perry's history of queerbaiting with songs like "I Kissed A Girl" and leaving her sexuality open to interpretation during a Human Rights Campaign gala. While backgrounding drag queens, this message and its potential underlying supporting for queer relationships make the act of appropriation rife with layered power dynamics.

In addition to using drag queens in videos, artists have been dressing in drag to make a point. To analyze appropriative accompliceship in music videos, I analyze Bad Bunny's music

video “Yo Perreo Sola,” which features Bad Bunny himself dressed in drag. The entire song is about respecting women and letting them dance alone if they do not want to dance with you. The video ends with a black screen that reads: “SI NO QUIERE BAILAR CONTIGO, RESPETA, ELLA PERREA SOLA [If she doesn't want to dance with you, respect her. She twerks alone].” Bad Bunny has been a loud supporter of LGBTQ+ rights and likes to play with *machismo* to make a point. Even in Swift’s video, which arguably uses drag queens as props to support her celebrity status, she also gives drag queens in her videos a platform and representation. In addition to including LGBTQ+ figures, her video is also produced by a queer person. Her video also ends with a message to sign a petition in support of the Equality Act. Appropriation is not good, but it is also not all bad. It is a rhetorical tool and a complex communicative act that is intrinsically linked to power, privilege, and identity. The next chapter will analyze these videos in more depth and the dynamics of their queer appropriation.

In addition to appropriating queer content and public figures, queer appropriation, appropriation can also be of format. To appropriate a format is to take a format that was created for the needs of the LGBTQ+ community and using it in a way that it was not intended for. My second analysis chapter focuses on the appropriation of a queer format of voice progression videos and how that format was used to amplify homophobic and racist content. When an individual starts hormones, such as testosterone or estrogen, their body starts to go through physical changes. One of those changes is how their voice sounds. As a way of tracking this progress, some people record themselves talking every week or month and comparing the tonality. It was often the same phrase, so they could see the exact changes. A popular example of this is “VOICE PROGRESSION ON TESTOSTERONE” by Chella Man. In his video he repeatedly states, “Hi my name is Chella Man, and this is my voice X weeks on t [testosterone].”

The video is only one minute long, but it spans from his first day all the way to the 38th week of Chella Man going through hormone therapy. As of October 2021, it currently has over 670,000 views on YouTube. In addition to analyzing the original video, I also analyze some of the many spoof and parody videos that appropriated this format for digital clout.

Conclusion

In exploring queer appropriation in digital spaces, I combine feminist rhetorical theory, queer theory, feminist rhetorical strategies, and the ally/accomplice framework to provide communication scholars a tool for navigating the messy and complicated ecology of cultural appropriation. Although acknowledging Rogers' (2006) important points about transculturation and the globalization of cultural content, the thesis highlights the need for additional attention to the rhetorical and power dynamics of borrowing from cultures that are not your own, and how this borrowing can have different consequences and perform different levels of advocacy.

Allies and Accomplices in Online Music Videos

In this chapter, I am going to be analyzing the different ways in which appropriation is used in music videos, using IAM's (2014) ally versus accomplice framework. Queer appropriation is used to gain both financial and social capital and is something that many musical artists do to grow and maintain their following. Specifically, I analyze Taylor Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" music video and Bad Bunny's "Yo Perreo Sola" music video. Both of these artists engage in queer appropriation through appropriating drag and trans culture, but I argue that their forms of appropriation constitute different rhetorical enactments of borrowing and incorporating queer culture into music videos. I characterize Swift's appropriation of queer culture as an ally, which is less effective in creating change and mainly benefits her instead of the LGBTQ+ community. Based on the frame of the "accomplice," I discuss ways that Swift's video could have been more effective in supporting the queer community. I also explain why Bunny's appropriation of queer culture is done through an accomplice lens that benefits the LGBTQ+ community and fights against the structures that ultimately hurt the queer community.

Taylor Swift – "You Need to Calm Down" as Appropriative Allyship

Taylor Swift is a Grammy Award-winning American singer and songwriter who has an influential music career that has spanned over 16 years and has earned multiple entries on the Billboard Top 100 charts. While initially a country singer, Swift eventually transitioned into a pop music artist and found even more success. Swift bolsters nearly 24.5 billion YouTube channel views and over 203 million Instagram followers (Swift, 2022). In her long career, Swift has received criticism for appropriation and, specifically, representations of race in her music videos. In the "Shake It Off" music video, which has over three billion views, Swift was criticized for the use of Black bodies and African American culture as props. In the video, Swift

is seen imitating and wearing clothes from different genres of dance (Swift, 2014). For the hip-hop section of the video, Swift is seen wearing large gold hoop earrings, gold bracelets, and gold chains with white sneakers, which are all stereotypes that are often associated with rap and hip-hop videos. In a different part of the video, Swift crawls under Black women dancers as they twerk above her. A *Billboard* article noted that Swift received backlash from Black artists for taking "signifiers of black culture and us[ing] them as a form of entertainment or mockery" (Ramirez, 2014). In the same way that Swift appropriates from African American culture in "Shake it Off," I argue that Swift also appropriates queer culture and performs unhelpful allyship in "You Need to Calm Down."

"Taylor Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" music video was released on June 17, 2019, after premiering on Good Morning America. As of April 2022, the video has 277,549,847 views and over 4.3 million likes on YouTube (Swift, 2019).[2] This song was released as a single from her then-upcoming album *Lover*. The timing of its release coincided with Pride Month, which celebrates the LGBTQ+ community. The music video shows Swift living in a trailer park that is also home to a large amount of popular queer figures. She is shown waking up in her own trailer, making a drink, laying in the pool, and walking through the trailer park while ignoring a mob of anti-LGBTQ+ protestors in the community. Throughout the video, it shows different cuts of Swift interacting with the popular queer personalities and celebrating people being proudly and openly queer. At the end of the video, there is a title card that asks viewers to sign a petition on Change.org to support the Equality Act.

Swift has a previous following from her country roots, and thus has a group of more typically conservative fans who may not approve of Swift being so vocal about queer rights

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dkk9gvTmCXY

(McIntyre, 2021). In this sense, there is a potential risk of her losing fans from this video, but this risk is probably quite low or offset by her established career, loyal fan base, and transition to the pop genre. In evaluating the music video as an act of queer appropriation, I argue that Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" is an example of appropriative allyship to the queer community because it 1) does not meaningfully challenge the system, 2) backgrounds the LGBTQ+ community, and 3) increases Swift's cultural and financial capital with little risk. To illustrate these overlapping reasons, I analyze "You Need to Calm Down" across three themes: cultural capital, financial capital, and the centering of Swift.

Cultural capital. For appropriation to occur in the frame of being an accomplice, the system must be meaningfully challenged and disrupted, or else it is allyship. According to IAM (2014):

> [Allies] uphold their power and, by extension, the dominant power structures by not directly attacking them. "Ally" here is more clearly defined as the act of making personal projects out of other folk's oppression. These are lifestyle allies who act like passively participating or simply using the right terminology is support. (p. 5)

"You Need to Calm Down" does little to fight against a heteronormative system except encouraging viewers to sign a petition that is featured quickly at the end of the video. The video card lasts five seconds, and since it is included at the end, it is likely that many people may have stopped watching or clicked away to the next video. This petition is rendered even less effective because as soon as it is shown on the screen, it is instantly and partially covered by a YouTube playlist link of Swift's other songs and another link to her most recent YouTube video.

Behind the rectangular video links, it says: "Let's show our pride by demanding that, on a national level, our laws truly treat all of our citizens equally. Please sign my petition for Senate

support of the Equality Act on Change.org" (Swift, 2019). The petition itself is linked in the description of her music video, but her new album is advertised first before the link to the petition. It states: "Music video by Taylor Swift performing 'You Need To Calm Down' – off her upcoming new album 'Lover' (out August 23). Support the Equality Act: https://taylorswift.lnk.to/petition" (Swift, 2019). It would have been more effective to include the petition in the beginning of the middle of the video instead of the end. Additionally, the call to sign the petition could have existed alone; the inclusion of the self-promotion within the description of the music video demonstrates Swift putting financial capital before the issue that she is advocating for. As of 2022, the petition has over 839,000 signatures, which makes it a very successful petition per Change.org's metrics (Change.org, 2022). However, this number seems less significant when compared to the 237 million views on the video, even considering that views do not represent unique viewers.

Additionally, petitions have long been questioned as a form of effective activism, especially if signing an e-petition is the only action taken. Much of the power of Change.org petitions comes not from the petition itself but how it brings together people on an issue that may jump start their individual "journey to activism" (Maxouris, 2020). While it is hard to evaluate the specific effectiveness of Swift's petition, I can characterize it, and other petitions, as largely working within established systems of politics and power as opposed to challenging those systems. It is important to note that in addition to promoting the petition, Swift did donate an undisclosed amount to GLAAD after referencing them in her music video as well as $113,000 to the Tennessee Equality Project (GLAAD.com, 2019). While potentially much less than some of

her other donations, Swift did make actual material changes by donating to LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations.[3]

Many people featured in the video are popular and successful queer figures that come with their own history and collective memory. To name a few, the video shows Laverne Cox, a television and film star who is the first transgender person to be on the cover of *TIME* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine along with being the first transgender person to win a Daytime Emmy Award; RuPaul Charles, a drag queen who created a drag empire through *RuPaul's Drag Race*; Todrick Hall, a "multi-talented singer, rapper, actor, director, choreographer, and social media personality" (TodrickHall.com, 2022) who became popular through YouTube compilations of lip syncs; Adam Lambert, an American Idol runner-up who was the first openly gay man to top the charts in 2012; Adam Rippon, an Olympic figure skater who was featured on *TIME*'s 2018 most influential list (TIME.com, 2018); the cast of the *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* reboot (Jonathan Van Ness, Karamo Brown, Antoni Porowski, Tan France, and Bobby Berk); Billy Porter, the first gay Black man to not only be nominated for a lead acting category, but to also win the category at the Emmys; Jesse Tyler Ferguson, an actor who became popular through his role as Mitchell Pritchett on *Modern Family*; Dexter Mayfield, a body positive model and dancer; and Ellen DeGeneres, comedian, actor, and TV host who publicly came out as queer on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, among others.

The variety of queer creatives promotes a curated message by Swift and the video that the present day is welcoming to the queer community by highlighting those who have been successful in breaking down barriers for queer entertainers. By seeing members of marginalized

[3] Swift's other donation amounts can be easily found online. For example, there is record of Swift donating $4 million to the country music hall of fame, $1 million to the middle Tennessee emergency response fund, and $250,000 to Kesha for her legal battles. (Aniftos, 2021)

communities as "tokens instead of people" (IAM, 2014, p. 2), the music video potentially tokenizes their presence by minimizing the struggles that remain for representation in TV, film, sports, music, and other arenas. Taylor (2013) states that prioritizing and platforming diverse and unheard voices is important; however, Swift only links her social media in the video description and only includes the name of the queer people that are featured in her video. Swift and her team could have easily included the other artists' social media URLs or handles in the descriptions with hers or invited less well-known queer figures to cameo in the video.

Appropriation in the video does not only happen visually but also verbally through using direct quotations and queer lingo. IAM (2014) argues that allies may be "familiar or skilled in jargon" from marginalizes communities, but do not "have meaningful dialogue … or take meaningful action beyond their personal comfort zones" (p. 5). Simply using queer lingo without engaging in larger struggles and activism is a mark of an ally (IAM, 2014). In the beginning of Swift's music video, it cuts to a framed picture of the quote "Mom, I am a rich man." This quotation is from an interview with Cher, who responded to her mother worrying about Cher marrying a rich man to take care of her. The use of this quotation uses a famous quotation from a famous LGBTQ advocate[4] as a vehicle for Swift to tease another song on her album, "The Man." There are many other ways that Swift could have teased the track title, but by using a Cher quotation, Swift is associating herself with a queer icon as well and appropriate Cher's reputation to promote *Lover*.

The official lyrics for "You Need to Calm Down" note that Swift sings: "Why are you mad when you could be GLAAD? (You could be GLAAD)" The singer is making a reference to

[4] Cher had been quick to criticize the Trump administration, but she was very vocal about his distaste for anti-trans bills that Trump passed. This is partly because she has trans son, Chaz Bono, who she has been very publicly supportive of.

the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation which is a pro LGBTQ+ organization that is commonly referred to as GLAAD. The inclusion of this lyric makes sense in the context of the LGBTQ+ pride themed music video, but it does not make as much sense when the song is framed as a message to the haters from Swift herself. No one is condemning Swift for being gay because she is straight, so including a gay rights organization when writing a song about how the public pits her and other women against each other is a jarring misalignment that potentially equates her issues with those of the queer community. These lyrics thus perform allyship as a way to extend her relevance to a queer audience.

Going deeper into her lyrics, the line: "Makin' that sign must've taken all night" is a reference to people protesting the existence of queer people at rallies, such as the Westboro Baptist Church. Swift shows the protestors as stupid, unable to spell, and stereotypical "rednecks." Instead of reinforcing stereotypes and undermining the existing barriers to LGBTQ+ acceptance, the video could have included religious leaders, politicians, and other conservative leaders (such as parodying political leaders who were not supporting the Equality Act). This characterization would have more fully represented the current threat to the queer community. Additionally, such a choice would have been risker for Swift, thereby adopting some aspects of being an accomplice because she would have engaged in a form of "mutual risk" with the queer community (IAM, 2014, p. 6).

While these protests are an issue, there are much more pressing issues and examples of anti-LGBTQ+ movements and organizations, such as the American Family Association, the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (ATCSI), the Family Research Institute, Positive Approaches To Healthy Sexuality (PATH), among others. A majority of these organizations and institutions seek to criminalize homosexuality and support conversion therapy

as a legitimate way to change one's sexuality. These organizations are actively creating false information and bias research as a way to support their own claims against homosexuality. This process is much more complex and dangerous than holding a sign during a protest and representing these ongoing threats to the queer community as a single, small group of protesters who "need to calm down" minimizes those ongoing struggles.

The lyrics also appropriate queer lingo, similar to how Black vernacular is appropriated by White people for profit (Smitherman, 1998). For example, the line: "Cause shade never made anybody less gay" borrows the word "shade" from queer communities of color; the term was popularized by Dorian Corey in a documentary titled, *Paris is Burning* about New York ballroom culture.[5] When someone throws shade it means that they are insulting someone, often playfully and indirectly, but it is a term and a popular pastime of those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Thus, this appropriation is two-fold of drag/ballroom culture, and people of color who popularized the phrase. By talking about anti-LGBTQ+ organizations and protestors throwing shade, Swift is characterizing hate speech, slurs, and anti-LGBTQ messages as "shade," thereby further trivializing the protestors' actions and undermining the original meaning of the term.

Another example of word appropriation is the term "tea" or the phrase "spill the tea," which is shorthand for getting the "truth" about a scandal or gossip. While not directly stated in the lyrics, tea or spilling the tea is seen within the music video. This visual reference is first seen when it quickly shows Tan France walking, then winking at the camera, and then drinking tea directly from a floral teapot. Later, Swift is sitting with the Fab Five, minus France, around a

[5] Ballroom culture, also referred to as ball culture or drag ball culture, references queer individuals throwing gatherings in secret where people were able to express their queerness through drag without the fear of being arrested or punished. There are shows like *Pose* and *RuPaul's Drag Race* that pay homage to this history.

table outside having a tea party. All the people at the table then clink their teacups together before looking up and winking at the camera, in a similar fashion as France, with the implication that the winks are directed at the protestors, who cannot disrupt their good time drinking tea. While there is an empowering message here that the queer community is unbothered by "haters," this scene can also be interpreted as the ultimate solution to homophobia and transphobia is to simply ignore the problems and barriers to equality and equity that queer people face instead of enacting meaningful change. The political landscape is not meaningful challenged in this video by viewers being told to sign a petition and "calm down" by not being homophobic without acknowledging contemporary struggles, risking Swift's own popularity, or calling for systemic change.

Financial capital. In this section, I analyze how Swift's video largely "advance[s] self interests" through "financial" benefit to Swift (IAM, 2014, p. 3). Because Swift's video is related to the LGBTQ+ community, the timing of its release during Pride Month is understandable. However, such timing could also indicate the temporary nature of Swift's support for the community, as similar tactics are used to gain both social and financial capital by companies changing their logo in June only to drop the allyship facade as soon as the month ends (Conrad, 2021l; IAM, 2014; Lubitow & Davis, 2011; Pezzullo, 2001). This echoes the concerns of the IAM (2014) that allies only offer "support and solidarity" on a "temporary basis" and are quick to abandon or jump from issue to issue as it suits them or is financially beneficial (p. 2). Corporations, and others, can thus adopt a sense of "cool" from a marginalized community while maintaining a "safe distance" from queer "violence" and the community's struggles (Roth-Gordon et al., 2020).

Despite the presence of Pride themes in the video, the main focus of "You Need to Calm Down" appears to be advertising *Lover,* promoting merchandise sales, and gaining financial capital for Swift. The music video contains references to other songs on the upcoming album as a way to tease the album's release. For example, the video shows DeGeneres getting a tattoo of the words "Cruel Summer" which is a featured song on the album, and it also includes the word *Lover* on a phone case within the video. Hayley Kiyoko, a singer, songwriter, dancer, and actor who initially got her start from acting as a child, is seen shooting an arrow into the number five on a target. While many fans speculated that this meant Kiyoko (affectionately named Lesbian Jesus by the LGBTQ+ community due to her openly queer lyrics, music videos, and pop songs) was going to be included on the album, it was simply a reference to the fifth song on the album titled, "The Archer." The choice of Kiyoko furthers the presence of LGBTQ icons in the video but did not extend to her being a part of the album creation itself. Kiyoko is a singer/songwriter who is queer and has a large queer following. Her inclusion could simply be because Swift and Kiyoko have worked together in the past, but it could also be interpreted as an intentional strategy to gain additional attention to the video and other songs on the album from Kiyoko's fan base.

Aside from the fact that Swift is advertising her upcoming album within the music video, Swift is also advertising merchandise for fans to buy. The video features scenes with yellow heart sunglasses, a sleep mask that is worn by Swift in the beginning with a gold embroidered "Calm Down," and a cat wristwatch. All of these items were for sale on Swift's website when the music video was released – the mask was $15, the sunglasses were $20, and the watch was $35. The advertising of merchandise provides evidence that the music video is, at least in part, a

vehicle for increasing sales. The music video was also monetized, meaning that YouTube pays Swift every time someone watches the video.

Swift's video also has product placement that supports other White straight celebrities. In one scene, Ryan Reynolds is featured next to a bottle of Aviation Gin, a company he owned when the video was shot, while he is painting a picture of the Stonewall Inn. While Reynolds' cameo is short, it is a rhetorically rich moment in the video for a few reasons. First, his inclusion among the cast of mostly women, people of color, and queer icons is heterodox as he appears to be the lone cis straight White man present. Second, he is shown painting a building of incredible importance to the queer rights movement,[6] which could have been performed by a queer artist or creative that could have benefited from millions of people seeing their work. Within a video already appropriating queer content as a performance of allyship, this part of the video stands out as appropriating the collective memory of the Stonewall Inn in the same way that President Regan appropriated the collective memory of Martin Luther King Jr. (Bostdorff & Goldzwig, 2005). Similar to how the fight for racial equality is often associated with MLK, LGBTQ+ rights are associated with Stonewall Inn and the Stonewall Riots. By including a painting of the location within the video, the music video is appropriating the historic relevance and significance of the location. The video is also inherently comparing the idyllic trailer park to the past, inviting the audience to consider that homophobia could be worse, and society has moved beyond the hatred and discrimination of the Stonewall era that ignited the queer rights movement. In this sense, the video is not challenging current structures of homophobia, but celebrating the progress

[6] The Stonewall Inn was a gay club that was raided by police who arrested both employees and people within the bar because they were queer. This lead to outcry from the community and six days of protests and violent attacks from the police attempting to control the riots. This day became in important moment within queer history and the struggle for queer rights.

that has been made, which can function to overlook, downplay, and gloss over the still real threats and barriers to LGTBQ acceptance.

Indeed, the entire tone of the video is colorful, happy, and celebratory. While this is not in and of itself problematic, the video's tone is potentially misaligned with the call for change through the petition. By focusing on being out and proud, the video is ignoring the systemic and cultural problems of why LGBTQ+ people have to find their own self-acceptance and create their own families when disowned by their actual ones. As of 2022, three years after the release of the video, anti-transgender and anti-LGBTQ+ bills are still being created and passed in U.S. politics. House Bill 1557, or the Don't Say Gay Bill, bans schools in Florida from talking about sexual orientation or gender identity which is a direct attack on queer students; Texas governor Greg Abbott also attempted to report parents of transgendered children to Child Protective Services if those parents were providing transgender healthcare to their children. Instead of only celebrating being queer, proud, and alive, an accomplice to the queer community may have also found space to highlight LGBTQ+ lives that were and are lost and under threat through the continued trials and tribulations of being queer in the United States and around the world.

Centering Swift. Even though "You Need to Calm Down" appears to be a gay pride anthem, Swift has admitted to the song also being a commentary about the way that people treat her online, and they way that the public likes to pit women against each other. An "I don't care about public perception" theme is one that has been repeated in multiple Swift Songs— "Shake it Off" and "Blank Space" being two popular examples. In the beginning of "You Need to Calm Down," Swift's lyrics center herself through the use of "I" and "me." The first lines of the song are:

You are somebody that *I* don't know

But you're taking shots at *me* like it's Patrón

And *I'm* just like "Damn, it's 7 a.m." (emphasis added)

In the second verse, Swift changes from "I" to "we" and includes others, ostensibly the LGBTQ+ community:

You are somebody that *we* don't know

But you're coming at my friends like a missile

Why you mad? (emphasis added)

By starting with her personal experiences, Swift is not acting as an accomplice, but is using queer culture as a vehicle for the discussion of other topics: her treatment by others and the media. In the same way that centering a cis straight White man in the original Queer Eye is ineffective, centering a rich, straight, cis White women in the middle of a pride video reproduces the already existing hegemonic norms that are controlled by the dominant heteronormative perspective (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006).

One way that "You Need to Calm Down" could have de-centered Swift would be by putting the focus on a queer person or artist in the video, such as Jade Jolie. Jolie was a drag queen on *RuPaul's Drag Race* season 5 who was famously mistaken for Swift by John Travolta at the 2019 MTV Video Music Awards (Lodi, 2019). It would have been a powerful move to de-center herself and give the spotlight to a queer individual to be the main focus of the video. There are others music videos that do not contain the singer or feature very little of the singer. Popular examples include Elton John's "This Train Don't Stop There Anymore" where Justin Timberlake plays him in the music video and Carly Rae Jepsen's "I Really Like You" music video, which primarily features Tom Hanks lip-syncing to the lyrics and features Jepsen briefly at the end. There are also other popular music videos like Sia's "Elastic Heart" or Hayley

Kiyoko's "Girls Like Girls" that do not feature the artist and instead focus on the narrative aspects of the song. Even a voice over of a popular queer figure, such as RuPaul or DeGeneres, could have been useful in de-centering Swift and giving the attention to members of the queer community. Beyoncé, for example, sampled the late Messy Mya who died from a shooting to make a political statement about the gun violence in Louisiana in the introduction of her song "Formation" (Ghahremani, 2016).

What Swift does not show also contributes to my characterization of the video as an act of appropriative allyship. The lack of queer affection in the video shows the lack of risk-taking and is evidence of Swift's video operating within heteronormative frameworks. Queer people are often framed as sexually deviant individuals that do not conform to the "normal" standards that have been set by society (Warner, 1999). The only instance of queer affection was a quick, non-passionate kiss between two men who were getting married. The social concept of marriage itself is a very heteronormative ideal that many queer people do not agree with because it functions as assimilation that looks to make the LGBTQ+ more palatable to heterosexual people and appears in the video as an appropriate time for queer affection (Warner, 1999). Swift also operated within the dominant discourse by not including any kids or teenagers within the video. In my own personal experience as a queer kid, I remember people constantly saying that kids are just confused and do not know what they are. For many, the thought of a child being openly queer and supported by their parents is poor parenting. The lack of this representation seems could be a decision to not ruffle any feathers or enter conversations around the treatment of queer youth, which is more politically charged currently than gay marriage.

Why lyrically centering herself, Swift also visually centers herself and previous works by including parallel cinematic shots that reference back to her "Black Space" music video. Within

the music video, there is a shot of aggressively grabbing a cake and shot of Swift in a full pajama set, which is also seen in the "Blank Space" music video, which is a video and song that critiques the narratives about Swift and her public perception. This provides additional evidence for the song and music video's meaning also being able her public perception and media treatment.

Another way that Swift visually centers herself is by backgrounding the queer community to be used as prop (Plumwood, 2002). The entire video is shot within a queer trailer park that features different groups of queer people in front of different trailers. In multiple shots of the video, Swift is walking through the middle of the town while the main focus stays on her. The town, and all the popular queer figures within it, are only a backdrop at the sides and back of Swift. Even within a shot of the Fab Five from the new Queer Eye, Swift inserts herself within the group. In one scene, Hall walks behind Swift down the center of the trailer park dancing and in another they are arm in arm as if Hall is an accessory to Swift's runway walk. Despite the many queer icons featured in the video, as listed in the previous section, none stay on the screen for more than a few seconds. The video cinematography is high-paced and flashes quickly between scenes (unless Swift is featured), so the many cameos are difficult to acknowledge and may be easily missed on first watch. Few share the screen for very long, which further supports their status as accessories and props for the focus of the video: Swift's performance. Instead of displaying the "authentic voice" of the queer community, they are backgrounded and used to amplify Swift (Taylor, 2013).

In another scene, there are eight popular drag queens who have appeared on *RuPaul's Drag Race* who are dressed as different female pop stars, including Jolie as Swift. The celebrities that they are imitating are Ariana Grande, Lady Gaga, Adele, Cardi B, Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, and Nicki Minaj. However, even in that shot Jolie is placed in the middle of the stage

and the shot starts with her being focused on while it zooms out and shows all of the other drag queen impersonators. Taylor (2013) argues that drag queens create unique drag personas filtered through their personal experiences; they way drag queens walk, talk, and dress is often inspired by real and authentic women that they know. However, instead of honoring the unique identities of the drag queens cast in the video, this authenticity disappears because they are imitating female celebrities. The loss of this authentic replication backgrounds the queer artists present in the video by using them to imitate female celebrities, furthering the video's primary plot line of making peace with Perry and calling for unity among female pop stars.

Additionally, beauty pageants have been long-critiqued for their display of women's bodies as sites of competition and value (Banet-Weiser, 1999), so the choice to represent them in a beauty pageant, akin to RuPaul's Drag Race, may further undermine the drag queen's individuality and reify competition between women. As the video ends, Swift centers herself and Perry by wearing large food costumes in front of a food fight that is happening behind them. They are also centered underneath the banner that says, "Pop Queen Pageant," which is again signaling that there is no need to pit successful women against each other within the music industry and focusing the message on Swift and her feud with Perry, which ultimately takes away from the pro LGBTQ+ messages. Swift thus provides support to the queer community as an "extracurricular activity" to her personal feuds (IAM, 2014, p. 4).

Swift's video uses enough queer lingo and icons to grab the attention of the LGBTQ+ community during pride month, but not enough to ostracize her fan base. The video is a pro LGBTQ+ music video that looks like it is shutting down bigoted homophobes in the form of protestors, but it functions to commodify queer culture to increase her financial and cultural capital. Financial through monetary gains and advertising and cultural through appealing to the

LGBTQ+ community while operating within what the patriarchy is allowing (Shugart et al., 2001). I thus categorize Swift's video as an example of appropriative allyship.

However, the music video should not be critiqued as solely negative. Despite these concerns over the appropriative allyship of the video, the song still celebrates the queer community, gives a platform to queer artists, including having Hall as a co-executive producer, and was overwhelmingly received as a gay pride anthem by fans. In the comments of the video, many fans were proud to see their pride flag within the video and representation that they could associate with. One commenter wrote, "As a trans and gay swiftie, Taylor this song is outstanding. It's great and it made me happy to see the trans flag aswell [*sic*] in the video! Go Taylor!" Even so, my analysis points out problematic rhetorical choices in Swift's music video that I characterize as appropriative allyship. While no artist or piece of media should be held accountable to impossible standards, it is important to critique potentially harmful and exploitative representations in media (Bloomfield, 2018, p. 175). There is often room for improvement, as I have noted regarding Swift's music video if she and other artists are interested in transforming appropriative allyship into appropriative accompliceship. When such a large and influential artist looks to appropriate another culture, it is important that the video is attempting to make a difference, bring attention to the ongoing challenges of the community, and benefits the culture they are taking from instead of only or primarily serving to improve an artist's cultural and financial capital. As a foil to the appropriative allyship of Swift, the following section explores an example of appropriative complicity in a music video.

Bad Bunny – "Yo Perreo Sola" as Appropriative Complicity

While I have shown an example of queer culture being appropriated as an ally, I also want to demonstrate how queer culture can be appropriated through an accomplice perspective as

a model of appropriation that can amplify the queer community without being exploitative. Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio is a Grammy award-winning Puerto Rican singer and songwriter who goes by the stage name of Bad Bunny. His music career has spanned over eight years; he has the first ever all Spanish album to hit No. 1 on the Billboard Top 200 as well as being Spotify's 2020 and 2021 artist of the year with over 19 billion streams between both years (Spotify.com, 2022).[7] He primarily stays within the Latin trap and reggaeton genres but is known for being able to adapt to many others. As of March 2022, his YouTube channel has nearly 19 billion views and 38 million followers on Instagram. Bad Bunny is an immensely successful artist that has grown a large fanbase since his first song, "Soy Peor," was released in 2016.

In the same way that Swift's large following equates to a large amount of influence, Bunny has a similar amount of influence on those who engage with the content that he creates. Unlike Swift, Bad Bunny is known for his activism both in his music and outside of it. He often uses appearances on talk shows, such the *Tonight Show,* to raise awareness on different issues. After one of his performances, he told the audience that the destruction of Hurricane Maria was still affecting Puerto Ricans over a year later. In a separate appearance on *The Tonight Show,* Bad Bunny wore a shirt that said, "Mataron a Alexa, no a un hombre con falda," which translates to "They killed Alexa, not a man in a skirt." This was a direct reference to the murder of a transgender woman named Alexa who was killed in Puerto Rico for using the women's bathroom. Throughout the media coverage of the horrific event, they were not respecting her identity as a woman and using her correct pronouns. Bad Bunny was also in the front lines protesting the Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rossello which led him to write a song and urge the people of Puerto Rico to vote (Biography.com, 2022).

[7] Taylor Swift was the second most stream artist of 2021 and the most streamed female artist that year (Spotify, 2022).

As of April 2022, Bad Bunny's "Yo Perreo Sola" music video has 543,007,791 views and 5.9 million likes (Bad Bunny, 2020).[8] The "Yo Perreo Sola" video starts off in a children's bedroom with a young boy in front of a television. The title of the song comes up, the boy touches the screen, and the video cuts to the start of the song. As the camera zooms into the television set, implying that the child is also watching the music video with us, viewers see Bad Bunny in full drag as the song starts. Throughout the rest of the video, Bad Bunny is seen going back and forth through different outfits—some in drag and some out of drag. The final scenes of the video show different women dancing to the song, and it ends with the statement: "Si no quiere bailar contigo, respeta, ella perrea sola."

I argue that Bad Bunny's "Yo Perreo Sola" is an example of appropriative complicity to the queer community because it 1) attempts to meaningful change the system, 2) centers the LGBTQ+ community, and 3) poses potential cultural and financial risk to Bad Bunny. To illustrate these overlapping reasons, I analyze "Yo Perreo Sola" across two themes: performing gender and foregrounding.

Performing gender. One of the biggest differences between the two music videos is that Bad Bunny is fully participating in queer culture by dressing as a woman and performing drag through the course of the video. As a heterosexual man, his performance of drag works to destigmatize drag as something only performed by the queer community; drag is an artform for everyone. For the music video, he hired a celebrity stylist that typically works with female celebrities and asked them to do the same thing for him. One of the main reasons that he is an accomplice instead of an ally is the risk that is involved. For Swift, there is not that much risk in releasing a pride-themed music video during Pride Month. From a Western perspective, being

[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtSRKwDCaZM

part of the LGBTQ+ community has been partially destigmatized, and the public is becoming more accepting, posing little risk to Swift and her established fan base.

While there is still work to be done, the situation in the United States for the queer community is much better than Latin American countries where public opinion and policy about queer people is inconsistent and, sometimes, hostile. Brazil, for example, provides legal protections for queer individuals, but also has one of the highest rates of LGBTQ+ murders in the world (Corrales, 2015). There is also a lack of LGBTQ+ rights and legal protections in the Caribbean (Corrales, 2015). *Machismo* is very prevalent within these cultures, which describes the hypermasculine, societal expectations that are communicated to Latin men through heterosexuality (Hardin, 2002). Machismo is the Latin version of toxic masculinity and often is defined as aggressive or exaggerated masculinity. Coming from Puerto Rico and singing in Spanish, Bad Bunny challenges the machismo norms of the Latino community and hegemonic values of masculinity. Consequently, "Yo Perreo Sola" poses more significant risk to Bad Bunny's cultural capital, financial capital, and even potentially his personal wellbeing. These risks are marked when compared to Swift's video whose engagement with queer culture is peripheral and backgrounding – standing in front of drag queens is a lot different than becoming one.

Throughout the video, Bad Bunny is seen looking very feminine. He's wearing tight and colorful clothing that accentuates his (padded) curves, he's wearing makeup, and he's wearing wigs and fake breasts. He is acting feminine in the way he's posing and dancing; his movement is fluid and includes a lot of hip movement. Additionally, he is seen being confident even though he is not being traditionally masculine. By engaging in the act of drag, Bad Bunny is engaging in "transformative womanist rhetorical strategy" because he is using his identity to subvert his

culture's expectations of his own lived and learned experiences (Taylor, 2013). By doing drag, Bad Bunny is employing a rhetorical strategy to invert his position as a man within a masculine society, which can be used as a tool for change (Taylor, 2013). This performance embraces drag and queer culture by defying gender expectations and gender performance and emphasizing different aspects of gender as a fluid spectrum. In performing drag, Bad Bunny is defying the audience's expectations of what a man should be, how a man should act, and how a man should present himself to society, especially within a fan base steeped in machismo (Sloop, 2000; Trujillo, 1991). Similar performance of drag by straight White men in music videos, such as Andrew Garfield in Arcade Fire's "We Exist," also challenge norms of masculinity, but do not have the added intersectionality of ethnicity that highlights the unique risks Bad Bunny undertakes in this video.

Near the beginning of the music video, it starts with a zoomed in frame of a red leather boot. As the camera zooms out, viewers see that the boot is worn by Bad Bunny who is dressed as a woman at the top of a set of stairs. As the video continues to zoom out, it shows that he is surrounded by a group of shirtless zombie-like men that are trying to walk up the stairs and touch him. Popular depictions of zombies show that they are void of thought; they are only able to process their base instincts to eat and nothing else. This creates a parallel between men do not possess critical thinking skills by solely viewing women as objects for sexual pleasure. Bad Bunny is positioning the shirtless, zombie-like men as negative because they represent the hegemonic masculinity that he is challenging through rejecting machismo and men's ownership over women's bodies. As they get closer, they are pushed away when the chorus says in Spanish in a female voice, "No chill, I twerk alone." It then cuts to Bunny twerking in different outfits by himself.

After the chorus ends and it switches to Bad Bunny's voice rapping, the video cuts to a scene where he is no longer in drag, but on top of a white car in a pink room. He is also dressed from head to toe in pink, while the floor is covered in different pink flowers. Within the field of flowers are people dressed in ghillie suits that match the flowers, and they start dancing around Bad Bunny who is on top of the car. Rapping in front of or on top of a car surrounded by women in a hip-hop music video is a common cliché of the format. By fully clothing the dancers and not showing their genders, but still having them twerk around an expensive car that he is on top of, Bad Bunny is engaging in appropriation through reflection (Shugart, 1997). Reflection is a counterhegemonic tactic that looks to take a text and put it up to a mirror to reveal the underlying ideas about hegemony. Bad Bunny engages in reflection by still operating within the hip-hop genre by rapping, flaunting his status through an expensive car, and having people dance around him, but he changes who the people are and what clothes they are dancing in (Shugart, 1997). By changing a few features of the format, one can still see the original format, but they can also see how strange this format is and how it privileges the exploitation of women's bodies by showing how strange it is to see people dancing in ghillie suits.

In this same scene, Bad Bunny is engaging in Shugart's (1997) ideas of refraction through his modification of the ghillie suits. By taking something that is traditionally masculine due to its association with war and hunting and adding traditionally feminine aspects to it—like florals and pink—he is making it into something that is more feminine but still functional and still being used for what it was made for—camouflage. It is refraction because other variations of ghillie suits, such as the arctic and desert, are used to blend into its environment to not be seen. By creating a new perspective on the original, Bunny's new variation is feminized to make a

point through the rhetorical technique of refraction as a way to emphasize the fluidity of gender and thus challenge gender binaries that machismo is rooted in (Shugart, 1997).

In another scene, the music video is edited to show the female version of Bad Bunny twerking on the male version of Bad Bunny. Within the shot, it is important to note that the male version of Bad Bunny does not put his hands on the female version of himself. His hands are to the side and fully in view the whole time. This is important because while someone may want to dance, they might not want to be completely grabbed or touched all over. He is also giving the female version of himself agency to walk away whenever she wants. She is given power and autonomy; a woman is able to celebrate and enjoy her sexuality whenever she wants, but she can also decide when, where, why, and with whom. Bad Bunny is thus performing the song's title of dancing "alone" with himself and thereby respecting women's boundaries and autonomy.

The woman is not backgrounded but put at the forefront because she is given power over the duration of the dance (Plumwood, 2002). So even though Bunny is twerking with himself, they are both still technically twerking alone. This is disrupting multiple features of Trujillo's definition of hegemonic masculinity. He does not have physical force and control over the female version of Bad Bunny; the woman is allowed to be sexually free without the expectation of sex. Such a scene also disrupts notions of "frontiermanship," which is the idea that masculinity is shown through "daring, romantic frontiersman of yesteryear and of the present-day outdoorsman" whose innate nature is to lay claim and settle the unruly environments that they are presented with; the best example in Western media being the rugged cowboy (Trujillo, 1991, p. 291). Bad Bunny is making a point that the club is not a place where men should be able to take over or "claim" the women trying to dance and have fun (Trujillo, 1991). Through his

lyrics and video, Bad Bunny is stating why women should be able to dance alone if they want to without men violating their autonomy.

In the very beginning of the music video, before the music starts playing, it shows an old school television playing a cartoon. It shows a pink and humanlike bunny, similar to Bugs Bunny, hiding from a hunter. The bunny then puts their hand on top of their faces and wipes it down to be shown wearing eyeliner, fake eyelashes, lipstick, a gold ring, and a blouse.[9] This transformation prefaces the video by showing a bunny switch from masculine to feminine in the same way that Bad Bunny is going to be seen in the video. After the transformation happens, the bunny kisses the hunter, and the title of the song appears on the television. While this is happening, it zooms out to reveal the room of a young child who is sitting and watching the television. He has on a beanie with bunny ears, potentially referencing that the boy is Bad Bunny himself or a fan of Bad Bunny's music. The television screen then changes to resemble a button. Curiously, the child pushes the button, gets knocked back, and the actual music video starts to load. The inclusion of this introduction is important because it is a statement about how young boys that are part of cultures where machismo and toxic masculinity are prevalent are a potential target audience for this content and who would otherwise be consuming content rooted in machismo. Instead, the music video invites all ages to understand that being feminine, exploring gender, and being queer is okay. Unlike the Swift video, which ignores youth engagement, Bad Bunny includes a boy in the beginning of the video to highlight the importance of this messaging and queer culture for all. The video is also saying that boys need to be taught to respect women and their choices from an early age. If this was taught and understood more, perhaps mindless violence against women would be reduced.

[9] I purposely use gender-neutral pronouns when referencing the first iteration of the bunny because there is no real indication of the bunny's gender.

Foregrounding. Instead of surrounding himself with queer icons and then backgrounding them (Plumwood, 2002), Bad Bunny shares space with women and the queer community by centering their experiences, representations, and struggles. In one scene, Bad Bunny raps in front of a green neon sign that says, "NI UNA MENOS" which translates to "not even one less." This is a reference to the "not even one less (woman)" movement that originally started in Argentina to demand the end of femicide and violence against women (Diaz, 2021). The movement started after a pregnant 14-year-old girl was murdered by her boyfriend for wanting to keep their child; this unnecessary violence against women is an ongoing issue within many South American countries, and this feminist movement looked to bring attention to the atrocities and fight for equal rights (Diaz, 2021).

There is nothing else in the room with Bad Bunny when he is rapping, so the audience is forced to pay attention to the large neon sign behind him. If a person does not know what this sign means or what it stands for, they may look it up and become informed on the issues that the movement is fighting against. It is also placed right in the middle of the music video, so it is likely more people will see the sign than if it were included it at the end after the music has stopped such as the closing petition invitation in "You Need to Calm Down." The inclusion of this hashtag and movement supports the accomplice perspective that IAM (2014) urges others to take because "accomplices aren't afraid to engage in uncomfortable/unsettling/challenging debates or discussions" (p. 5). Bad Bunny could have easily used a different hashtag or not even included it in the first place, but as a Latino man himself, he used his own privilege as a successful man with a large platform to address an important issue regarding gender violence. IAM (2014) noted that accomplices do not "resign[] their agency," but "find creative ways to weaponize their privilege" to challenge oppressive systems. Bad Bunny advocated for a cause

that was relevant to him and the Latin American community and engaged them in an uncomfortable conversation about murder, rape, domestic abuse, and the lack of equality.

While not as obvious as the "NI UNA ENOS" neon sign, the music video also cuts back and forth to a sign that says, "Las Mujeres Mandan" which translates to "Women Rule." Not only is this sign indicative of women empowerment, but it is also a reference to a song that goes by the same title by Paquita la del Barrio. The song is a feminist anthem that talks about women realizing their worth and demanding better treatment. He is bringing attention to a different artist by including their song within his own music video and diversifying the voices and perspectives that are present within his own music video. He is allowing the voices of women in the movement to be recognized through giving it more attention than it would have received otherwise. While Swift a similar act of verbal appropriation with the Cher quotation, its usage is done in part to advertise and reference her own song. Bad Bunny is not explicitly advertising himself or products, beyond the song itself, and instead references a Hispanic feminist icon that has constantly fought against hegemonic masculinity and been criticized for it throughout her entire career as a Mexican singer. It is a respectful nod to how women have been fighting for this equality and equity for decades. Bad Bunny is not the first to do so but is joining the cause by using his music video and song to advocate against hegemonic masculinity.

This foregrounding of women and challenging the patriarchy is also seen in the remix of the song that he premiered at the 2020 Billboard Music Awards. In this remix, Bad Bunny brought out Ivy Queen and Nesi to perform the song with him. Both of these women are reggaeton artists, but Ivy Queen is considered an icon of the genre that has gained status through her continued relevance in a male-dominated genre of music. Nesi is not as well known, but she is the female voice that is on the original "Yo Perreo Sola" track. In the remix, Ivy Queen takes

part of the song from Bad Bunny and performs it herself while Nesi performs her parts. By doing this, Bad Bunny is giving up part of his platform and song for two different generations of female reggaeton artists to have the spotlight. While an effective act of appropriative complicity, perhaps an even stronger foregrounding would have featured these artists more prominently on the original. The remix of the song is not part of the album, but it is featured as a single. If the remix was featured on the original album, it may have gotten more attention. As for the original song, Nesi is credited within the song credits as well as the description of the YouTube video, but not as a featured album on the track. From an Instagram Live, Bad Bunny states that he did not want the female voice to be featured on the song because he wanted the voice to be anonymous to represent that it is the voice of many people and not one person (Nesi, 2022). The two artists are on good terms based on Nesi's Instagram posts, and while I understand the thought process behind Bunny's reasoning, Nesi should have gotten more credit and been able to stand in for herself and the voice of all women.

Another scene in the video shows Bad Bunny in a pool of shallow water. He is shirtless and wearing a long skirt; each of his arms and legs are chained and they each are controlled by a different woman that is sitting in an elevated and elaborate throne towards the back of the room. The shot is particularly interesting because it is an appropriation of the traditional trope of a woman being chained up and wearing less clothing with a male figure controlling her. One of the most popular examples of this is Princess Leia being chained to Jabba the Hutt wearing next to nothing in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. It reinforces the patriarchal assumption that men are more powerful than women, and that women exist as sexual objects and/or trophies to men that they are able to control. By having this scene in the music video, Bad Bunny is challenging gender norms and engaging in reflection by swapping the genders from dominant and submissive

and from powerful to vulnerable (Shugart, 1997). Additionally, this scene disrupts the first feature of hegemonic masculinity which is physical force and control because he is giving all women all of the control over him (Trujillo, 1991). This complete lack of control is demonstrated by each of his legs and arms as well as his neck being chained and held by a woman. Furthermore, he is also handcuffed which reduces his control even more.

As the song comes to an end, it cuts to a plethora of different women dancing and twerking by themselves and Bad Bunny is absent. By leaving the screen and backgrounding himself, the music video is able to foreground all of the other women who are being shown dancing. All of the women shown are of all different body types, age, ethnicity, race, and are in various styles of dress. This representation plays to the point that women do not have to look or dress a certain way to be respected and to want to dance by themselves. Unlike "You Need to Calm Down," the other people featured in the video are not famous celebrities or icons. Bad Bunny could have used cameos to bring additional attention to his video to build his own cultural capital. Instead, the choice to use everyday women emphasizes the pervasiveness of the issues being discussed in the song and foregrounds those experiences as more important than Bad Bunny or celebrities. He is allowing for diverse female perspectives to be seen through their presence as the focus of the video for long, continuous shots (Plumwood, 2002; Taylor, 2013).

The video ends with a message that reads, "Si no quiere bailar contigo, respeta, ella perrea sola" which translates to "If she doesn't want to dance with you, respect her, she dances alone." I interpret this call to action as more rhetorically significant than Swift's petition because this song and music video solely make a statement about machismo and hegemonic masculinity as a central theme. He is calling out his fans who have been raised in these cultural ideals to do better, which could lead to personal reflection and behavior change instead of working through

formal, institutional channels. Through this last part of the music video, Bad Bunny is restating the importance of women empowerment and calls for viewers to respect women's autonomy. Through using queer and drag culture, which overlaps with women empowerment and disrupting machismo culture, Bad Bunny is able to send a powerful message that helps to break down hegemonic masculinity which not only affects women, but also affects queer bodies that do not fit within the typical ideas of masculinity. Feminist rhetorical theorists argue that oppression is linked and intersectional; the same systems that affect women affect queer individuals as well (Dow, 1995; Plumwood, 2002; Taylor, 2013). Through appropriating queer culture, Bad Bunny is acting as an accomplice more than an ally. He is taking risks to his cultural capital, financial capital, foregrounds others, and centers a call to action that raises awareness about important issues facing marginalized communities, weaponizes his privilege, and invites behavior changes in viewers.

Conclusion

Ultimately, there is never going to be an ideal music video that perfectly encapsulates an accomplice identity, because the medium is intertwined with capitalism through album sales, self-promotion, and celebrity. Despite these constraints on the genre, I draw important differences between "You Need to Calm Down" and "Yo Perreo Sola" to better understand what queer appropriation is, what it looks like when used and commodified by dominant groups, and how it functions within popular media and culture. By building a foundation from feminist rhetorical scholars like Shugart, Taylor, Plumwood, and Dow who show the power dynamics related to appropriation as well as Trujillo's feature of hegemonic masculinity and IAM's ally vs accomplice framework, I characterize "You Need to Calm Down" as appropriative allyship and "Yo Perreo Sola" as appropriative complicity.

Therefore, if an artist wants to take an accomplice perspective, they should de-center and background themselves as a way to let those who are actually experiencing the issues have a voice and platform and share their authentic experiences (Plumwood, 2002; Taylor, 2013). By centering the community that an artist is trying to help and represent, the artist allows for more attention to be brought to certain issues. It is also important for artists to take real and legitimate risks. When an artist has very little to lose and a lot to gain, the act in and of itself is performative allyship. If one truly wants to be an accomplice, they have to be willing to fight battles in places that the discriminated communities are not allowed access into, and they have to be willing to engage in conflict about uncomfortable issues (IAM, 2014). While Swift and Bad Bunny both borrow queer and drag culture, Swift primarily uses them as a background, prop, and vehicle for her merchandise, music, and media attention and, while Bad Bunny actively engages in the performance of drag to make a point about gender and machismo. They both have calls to action, but Bad Bunny is directly calling out those who engage in the negative behavior while Swift is asking to sign a petition and work within existing channels that are largely discriminatory to the queer community. They both also reference other artists in their videos, which can be calls to recognize queer and feminist history, but Swift's video pairs this history with advertising her own songs and products, while Bad Bunny aligns this history with the video's messaging around women empowerment.

I have argued that these two music videos largely represent appropriative allyship and appropriative complicity. It is important to acknowledge that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and the videos contain aspects of the other categories with both having avenues for improvement to be stronger accomplices to the queer community. Music videos are just one arena where queer appropriation happens; it is also seen within social media—specifically

TikTok. In the same way that these music videos get posted and shared on social media networks, pieces of queer content receive the same treatment on platforms such as TikTok that operate through using other's content as your own. Pieces of queer culture get shared and changed and adapted to the point where one might not even understand that appropriation is happening or where the piece of media originated from. In the next chapter, I am going to examine the elusive nature of globalization and interconnectedness through social media, which is the perfect context for appropriation to happen and, indeed, is encouraged by the Internet's affordances. Analyzing queer appropriation on social media will be much more complex and messier due to the Internet's constantly changing environment that benefits from the act of appropriation. While still examining the ally/accomplice framework, I locate my arguments about queer appropriation on social media between two popular schools of thought that look to address the interconnectedness of the Internet and the constant appropriation of culture from multiple communities.

Appropriation on Social Media – Creating Space within Digital Spaces

This section of this paper examines the rhetorical effects of globalization through the Internet and social media. Specifically, I analyze the communicative practice of appropriation and how it functions rhetorically within popular culture in digital spaces. In the previous chapter, I used IAM's (2014) framework of "ally" and "accomplice" to evaluate queer appropriation in music videos. While allies appropriate a marginalized community for their own benefit and background the community's voices, accomplices take on risk, advocate for direct action, and foreground the community's voices. This chapter was originally supposed to focus on one example of an accomplice perspective to juxtapose against the previous example of allyship in the same way that the first chapter compared the two music videos. In starting this chapter, I found that applying this same framework to the Internet, however, was much more challenging. The Internet is a place that allows for millions of people to post, comment, like, share, retweet, save images and videos, cross post on different sites, follow, unfollow, upvote, react, and delete billions of different pieces of content. These digital spaces are complex, constantly evolving environments and they all support different communities, purposes, and effects.

While it is easy to be an ally on social media and profess support for a community with little direct action, do the affordances of the Internet and the constraints of social media make becoming an accomplice virtually impossible? I argue that although being an accomplice is more difficult in digital spaces, it is present. Additionally, it is important to try and evaluate appropriation, trace origins, and identity harmful and beneficial appropriative practices in digital spaces. This is because gaining social capital through the Internet and social media also equates to financial gain as well. Accounts with large followings are able to influence thousands, sometimes millions, of people who may be taking advantage of a smaller community's culture to

do so. There are two distinct schools of thought in the literature about the matter. The first school of thought is that appropriation is inevitable because of how interconnected we are; as something gets taken and changed, it becomes impossible to trace where it came from and who started it (Rogers, 2006). I do not disagree that appropriation is inevitable because it is; the Internet, social media, and the meme all survive off of appropriation and modification of other's content. However, I do disagree with the lack of importance this perspective puts on the power dynamics intertwined within appropriation. Rogers does briefly acknowledge the power dynamics that exist within appropriation, but there is not enough focus on the importance of it. Queer culture and queerness are constantly commodified within popular culture in ways that exploit the community and do rhetorical harm to its members.

As the Internet expands and queer culture is popularized, dominant communities may ignore the LGBTQ+ voices that created the content, fought for it, and lived their whole life being targeted or mocked because of it. Consequently, the second school of thought regarding appropriation and digital spaces argues to limit who is allowed to interact and use the content that marginalized communities have created (Howard, 2022). This perspective fully acknowledges the power dynamics that exist within appropriation and advocate for content creators having full control over the content their culture creates and restricting the usage of cultural makers to groups within that community (Howard, 2022).

I propose a path down the middle of these two perspectives. It is extremely important to understand and acknowledge the power behind appropriation and the communities that are being taken from, and it is important that all people are able to use queer culture as long as they are willing to be an accomplice instead of an ally. The LGBTQ+ community has a vibrant culture with huge personalities who are appealing to mainstream audiences. Because of this, the queer

community has the ability to grow financial capital through its rising social capital. I argue that queer culture can be used by everyone, as long as it is being done respectfully and the original creator is directly benefiting from the appropriation. In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of scholarship on queer culture in digital spaces. Then, based on the ally/accomplice framework modified for the fluidity of digital spaces, I then turn to my analysis of a viral TikTok trend and ways to use and engage with queer content as an accomplice instead of an ally.

Digital Space as Queer Space

The popularization of the Internet created new outlets for the queer community who often moved to online spaces before their straight counterparts (Dasgupta, 2017). Digital spaces such as chatrooms gave queer and questioning queer individuals the ability to be queer without being out and thus potentially at risk in physical reality (Dasgupta, 2017). This is true for the trans community as well, where "technology enables [them] to express personal identities that may be dangerous to display offline" (Bloomfield, 2018, p. 282). Queer people had a space free from fear of being outed or attacked, which is why digital spaces and LGBTQ+ individuals share a different relationship within digital spaces than straight people do. While these spaces are important and helpful in creating community, it is important to note that "online space is unfortunately shaped as much by its physical antecedents as it is by its ideological alterity," meaning that the Internet is not a perfect, ideal, inclusive utopia for marginalized communities (Dasgupta, 2017, pp. 3-4).

Even though online spaces can be positive, productive spaces for the queer community, the Internet is still influenced by the heteronormative ideals that fight against queerness. These queer online spaces are far from perfect, and they can be easily infiltrated by people looking to cause harm. Even digital spaces like video games can create environments that directly support

hegemonic masculinity through its catering to straight men (Paaßen, et al., 2017). Gray (2012) argues that "disinhibition" is a large factor that adds to virtual inequality in online spaces like Xbox Live. Disinhibition occurs because online spaces are anonymous, create invisibility, are asynchronistic, and minimize and distribute authority, among other features (Gray, 2012, pp. 414-415). Essentially, one's ability to hide their true identity adds to one's ability to mark online spaces as imaginary or unreal allows people to harass others. The lack of authority or true punishment within online spaces is another major concern that allows people to actively target and harass others within digital spaces. When a social media platform requires an individual to pick either male or female, or automatically assume one for data collection purposes, it reinforces the idea that people are only able to be male or female (Bivens & Haimson, 2016). Companies like Facebook not allowing trans people or drag queens use their chosen names is also an issue that looks to support values that are inherently anti-LGBTQ+ by attempting to diminish or ignore an individual's chosen gender identity (MacAulay & Moldes, 2016).

Due to the constraints of social media, there are very few ways that people can engage in direct action. Individuals can engage in hard conversations through social media, but people are also able to easily ignore those conversations. The ability to donate and create fundraisers is more widespread, but there are more effective ways to promote change as an accomplice. Even the constraints of social media rules and regulations limit an individual's autonomy. Large companies like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok all have the power to filter and choose what people can post and what is able to be seen. Instead of completely banning accounts, companies have begun to engage in what is popularly known as shadow banning. Essentially, an account is deprioritized, and their posts are not promoted by the algorithm. While the user is not technically banned, it greatly reduces the amount of engagement they get. This becomes a problem when

queer content is flagged as inappropriate or not suitable for certain audiences and thus is not circulated as widely as "appropriate" content. A similar issue happened with YouTube where queer content creators found that their content was automatically being flagged and demonetized; when a video is demonetized it is marked as unsuitable to advertisers because it contains inappropriate themes. Through investigation, it was found that certain words like gay and lesbian triggered the algorithm and demonetized some videos containing those words automatically (Romano, 2019). A majority of views and money is gained when a video is first posted, but these profits were lost due to this automatic censorship. This cost queer creators money and led to some of them changing their titles or censoring themselves to not alert the algorithm, which undermines queer content's visibility and acceptance.

While Dawkins (2005) defined passing is terms of marginalized racial communities adopting features of dominant culture to be accepted, we can see a similar process being used in terms of sexuality. In order to make a living and continue to create queer content, creators are forced to "pass" their content in order to deemed "appropriate" and go unnoticed by the algorithm (Morris, 2002). However, these practices ultimately reinforce the algorithm's ability to censor queer content ad uphold norms and standards for sexuality and sexual expression (Dawkins, 2005). TikTok's algorithm was also found banning and restricting certain LGBTQ+ words that were used in hashtags in other countries (Fox, 2020). As with companies not changing their logos in certain countries, TikTok's main goal is to appeal to as many users as they can. Examples of queer representation, resistance, and accompliceship are limited in their effectiveness when social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok promote only the "palatable" side of the queer community (Warner, 1999). These companies overtly and tacitly support hegemony as a way to expand their companies' social capital (IAM, 2014; Shugart et al.,

2001); these confines of social media only value queer content creators once they prove profitable to the platform and do not offend other users.

The influence that queer culture has on popular and social media is undeniable. Through memes, gifs, popular vernacular, and even formats queer culture has been foundational in attributing to mainstream culture. As images, phrases, and cultural markers circulate online, they are removed from a queer context and can be used to benefit other groups, as is the case in appropriative allyship. For example, reaction gifs of sipping tip have become popular due to the use of the "tea" and "sipping tea" in gay slang for gossiping. Popular gifs such as Kermit the Frog drinking tea have become a popular example of how widespread gay culture can circulate online. Large corporations like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) have gotten in on the trend by making gifs that capitalize off the popularized words and phrases from the queer community. In a gif created by the organization, it shows a kitten in a teacup with the phrase, "what's the tea?" The ASPCA has its name watermarked on the bottom of the gif, almost as though the group is attempting to claim the phrase as their own. The ASPCA is appropriating queer culture as a way to expand their relevance and gain social capital through sharing the gif, thereby "advanc[ing] self interests" instead of supporting queer rights (IAM, 2014, p. 3).

This appropriation of queer culture can also be seen in K-pop (Korean popular music) fan communities. The rise in popularity of K-pop means that groups such as Black Pink and BTS have gained huge followings from around the world. As ways to show their dedication to both their peers and idols, obsessive fans or "stans" of K-pop often make gifs or fancams of the group or specific members, idols, to share their excitement. Due to the diversity of these groups, there is a lot of intermingling of cultures. While a queer person might originally make a gif with the

word “shade” on it, that gif can be taken and used by others who found the gif under a post or on a fan page. Reusing templates is part of the way that memes mutate and circulate, meaning that a queer phrase may be appropriated and used outside of its original context and used by people outside of the queer community. These are not necessarily malicious or even intentional acts of appropriation; a sharer may not even understand the queer and African American roots the word has due to the fluid nature of origins and ownership online. However, such actions are still appropriation because a part of a culture is taken and used outside of the community and context that it was originally created in and for. As opposed to the potential benefits that an organization might gain from using “hip” lingo out of context, such as the ASPCA, the Internet also creates more opportunities for “lateral appropriation” across online communities, such as between queer communities and racial minorities (Anspach et al. 2007). In the next section, I will focus on an example of appropriation on TikTok that highlights the uncertainties, complexities, and dynamics of queer appropriation in digital spaces.

Analyzing the Appropriation of Chella Man on TikTok

While there is a plethora of different social media platforms I could use to analyze queer appropriation online – such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest – I will be focusing on TikTok. TikTok is a social media platform that uses short-form video content to entice users to use their app. Short-form video content means videos that are short and easy to watch quickly. There is no universal definition for how long a short-form video is, but it is often under five minutes. On TikTok, a user can post a video that is 15 seconds to three minutes long. TikTok is an ideal platform for analyzing appropriation for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that TikTok is the most popular social media platforms as of 2021; the social media website not only

surpassed Facebook as the most popular social media platform, but TikTok is more popular than Google (Rosenblatt, 2021) The second reason is that the format specifically promotes appropriation by enabling users to easily make a video that juxtaposes their video with an existing video (called a duet), thereby directly interacting with previous content and incorporating it into a new context. TikTok's quick and fast type of content does not allow for the video creators to give much context to the videos that they are creating. This lack of context is good for virality and meme-ification because it allows their ambiguity to adapt to distinct cultural environments, which is essential for the meme's survival (Davi, 2007). In other words, a format, cultural symbol, or phrase can be easily adapted to fit a plethora of diverse cultures and/or communities.

TikTok is also well known for viral videos where people copy the actions, phrases, or format of existing videos, such as a dance trend. Copying a format refers to how videos may copy one another in terms of their structure and content. For example, this type of format copying has been seen with "Yo Mamma" jokes, which has the format: "Your mama is so [insert insult i.e., fat, dumb] that she [punchline referring to the insult]. On TikTok, people can copy the format of a viral video leading to others copying it to achieve the same amount of success and popularity. However, this feature of TikTok also makes finding original sources or creators more difficult. While one might assume that the most liked or viewed video is the original, it is easy for a creator with a larger platform to copy a format and outperform the original in terms of views.

Given the rise in TikTok's popularity, I will examine the rhetorical effects of a queer format being appropriated and reformatted to fit within the hegemonic discourse while effectively erasing its queer roots. Instead of financial benefit, this format of appropriation offers

the opportunity for "notoriety" in participating in a viral trend (IAM, 2014, p. 3). However, it is important to note that these people engaging with the format and using it to follow the trend are not trying to be allies for the queer community; I am sure that most did not even know where or why the trend started in the first place—they only see its popularity and easy to adapt format as a way to gain followers or attention. This is part of the complexity of analyzing appropriation on social media. To examine appropriation on TikTok, I analyze Chella Man's video and the viral circulation of some of its parodies.

On June 28, 2018, Chella Man released a video titled, "ONE YEAR ON TESTOSTERONE: Voice Updates."[10] Man[11] started as a YouTuber and expanded his career to becoming an actor, model, artist, author, and an activist for the deaf and LGBTQ+ community. He is a transgender man and has been incredibly open about his personal journey through his YouTube channel, art, and advocacy work. As of April 2022, his channel has 21,580,184 views and this particular video has over 4,817,074 views and is the most popular one on his channel (Chella Man, 2022). In this four-minute-long video, Man is documenting his journey as he goes through his transition through a series of short clips taken over various time frames. The video starts with Man saying, "Hi my name is Chella Man, and this is my voice one week on t." The letter "t" stands for testosterone injections. Man repeats this phrase each week within the same video to document the changes in his voice due to the testosterone injections. Man is documenting his progress to show his audience the transformation, but it is also a video for Man himself. The process of transitioning is an important one. An individual that is going through hormone therapy is able see their physical body change to match the mental and emotional vision

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsjBGqTjWu4

[11] Chella Man is both the name of the YouTube channel and the legal name of the artist. In line with the convention of referring to people by their last name after their introduction, I will be referring to Chella Man as Man for the rest of the paper.

of themselves. Transgender individuals often struggle with body dysmorphia due to this mismatch and digital spaces can be arenas to explore that alignment (Bloomfield, 2018).

By documenting this process of transition and hormone therapy, Man is creating important conversation around the topic while also normalizing it within popular discourse. For people who have not actively interacted with a transgender person or are only familiar with passing trans people within popular media such as Laverne Cox, seeing a person go through these changes can be powerful and informative. By showing a transgender individual in a show like the original Queer Eye, for example, helped to inform those who were unfamiliar with the topic (Booth, 2011). The show disrupted the binary of gay men and straight men as distinct categories through showing a transgender man who was bisexual. Similarly, Man's visibility means he could serve as an example for others to learn from and relate to in the trans community. Within each of Man's short clips, Man is wearing a different outfit in various locations; he is seen wearing a face mask in one of the clips as well. By showing this timeline within normal everyday spaces and tasks, it informs those who are watching that it is not an instant overnight change, but a slow change that takes time.

While Man is not the first to do a progression style video, his video was unique because he focused on how his voice changed within a year while taking testosterone. There are many distinct reasons Man might have focused on voice alone, but it is likely that he focused on voice because he is deaf. He is able to hear through a cochlear implant, but his deafness is an important part of his identity that is inseparable from his queerness. This inability to separate identity markers is a key component of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Man's experiences the world through a perspective of being queer, deaf, Chinese, and Jewish. Like all of us, there is never a

point in his life where Man is able to separate his identity or only experience a situation through his deafness–those identities are multiply intersecting and marginalizing (Crenshaw, 1989).

While appreciating his queerness, Man is also celebrating the fact that he is able to hear his voice changing with the help of his implant even with his deafness. Within other content that he has created, he talks about how hearing is something that is taken for granted. The world looks much different as a deaf person, and something as simple as hearing your voice, and the changes it might undergo to better reflect one's gender identity, is something that many deaf people cannot do. There are plenty of other transition videos that documented physical changes, like muscle mass and hair, but Man's was distinctly different for only focusing on voice–even though the viewers are also able to see the physical changes such as his jawline caused by testosterone over time.

I characterize Chella Man's video format as intrinsically queer. Man is an openly genderqueer and trans-masculine individual who created this format to show his journey and queerness to the world. Because transitioning gender is unique to the community, the format was used to document those changes over time, which is not a process that non-queer communities undergo. The intention of this video is to increase visibility and acceptance of the queer community as well as being a record of Man's personal journey. The video is thus made by a queer person for other queer people as a reminder of the work that has been done for fighting for equality, but also the work that still needs to be done. In the description of the video, Man writes:[12]

[12] The text below is copied as accurately as possible from Chella Man's video description, including the spacing. Because this is a direct quotation and Man is a creative and artist, I wanted to be faithful to the original content, style, and format in which it was written to accompany the video.

Today is my one year on testosterone.

I honestly do not know if I will ever find the words to properly express how thankful I am for this opportunity and privilege. It seems that words will never suffice to convey the intensity of my appreciation.

So, I turn to the perpetual fight of equality and continue to be mindful of the pain I used to live in.

Without my personal memories of extreme dysphoria and depression, I would not be my best self. Clinging to these memories that have impinged me fuel the fire and fight.

I will never stop.

This past year was the most honest year of my life, the first year of my life.
I took a wrecking ball to the walls I built around my core throughout the past eighteen years of my life.

Opening up the heaviest, most internalized aspects of my identity, I shared them, unapologetically, with the world to accept. This was never easy, but the idea of having a chance to become the physical embodiment of my true self was enough to put everything on the line.

I had no idea what to expect or what I would look like.

But, here I am.

I became him.

My name is Chella Man.

And, I am one year on testosterone today.

Thank you to all who have fought for transgender and queer rights, now and in the past, as you have allowed me to live this life.

Thank you MaryV for consistently reminding me; I am worthy of love in this world.

Thank you to my family for listening to me, verbally or through sign language.

Thank you to all of you who have sent your hearts to me, wherever you may be.
Please know, your messages of support and encouragement are taken in, not just by me, but countless others who need to see the love, acceptance, and support.

This world is changing.

To be continued. (Man, 2018)

Within this video description, Man is thanking the community that has supported him along with his girlfriend, MaryV. This success, visibility, and celebration of transmasculine people is rare, making this video a poignant disruption of dominant discourse. Transgender people are underrepresented within media, and transmasculine individuals, like Chella Man, are particularly underrepresented (Banks, 2021).

Aside from media representation, there is a huge lack in resources and access to trans-related health care. There are many insurance companies that refuse to pay for gender affirming surgeries or hormone therapies, which has forced transgender individuals to pay for these treatments through crowdfunding (Barcelos, 2019). This structure of transgender individuals having to ask for help from alternate sources is harmful symbolically in that it reinforces heteropatriarchy and materially in that it may advertise one's gender identity and open up the community to harm. Man was able to receive support for his treatments, which he documented. Man also received community support in the form of encouragement and thanks in the YouTube comments section. People comment on how great it is to see his confidence grow or how proud they are of him and all the other transgender people out there. The video thus speaks to people who are part of the community and may wish to transition themselves or are non-queer viewers who are unfamiliar and learning about this process.

After the video's popularity, Man's format was appropriated by non-queer users and became a part of mainstream culture through a TikTok trend. This trend became popular, and many users began copying the format without realizing where the format originated from and its original purpose to highlight voice changes in the trans community. Man's video was posted on June 28, 2018. A TikTok user that goes under the name of Alaina Hatsune, posted a video six

months later using the same format on December 15, 2018.[13] The video is structured nearly identically to Man's, except for what Hatsune is "on" resulting in voice changes. In the first part of the video, Hatsune walks up to a bathroom mirror wearing a t-shirt and jeans and says, "This is my voice, one day on anime" in what seems to be her normal voice. The next clip is the same, but her voice is higher, and she is now wearing a skirt instead of pants. Unlike the deepening of Man's voice, Hatsune's voice is becoming higher, which is a stereotype of female anime characters having high-pitched voices. The next clip is the same, but she is talking in an even higher-pitched voice and adding extra emphasis to the ending of the sentence with upward inflections and wearing a long sleeve shirt with the skirt. While the audience expects her to go even higher and add more emphasis on her voice for the final clip, she completely disrupts the audience's expectations by speaking Japanese in a pitch that is deeper than the first clip and wearing jeans and a shirt. She is also talking faster with more intensity, imitating not female anime characters but male anime antagonists, with her hand behind her head before she starts laughing increasingly, as a villain does when their plan is working, while zooming into herself.

There is no way to indefinitely prove that this video was the first one to start the trend on TikTok, but Hatsune has one of the most popular versions of it that helped to push the trend and format forward. Other variations of this video often focused on popular figures, such as cartoon characters or celebrities with distinct voices (Dora, Shrek, T-Pain, Deadpool, Jojo Siwia), and locations, China, Africa, the American South, France, Germany, to imitate and thereby enact stereotypes.[14] Many of the users that engaged in this trend used racist stereotypes as a way to make their videos funnier or more shocking. In one version of the TikTok, a Caucasian girl says,

[13] https://www.youtube.com/shorts/yQ6RR5_FKwI
[14] This link is to a compilation video of the "This is my Voice" meme including many of the videos referenced in this chapter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEuTIDTMS2E&t=152s

"This is my voice one day on Chinese food." As the TikTok progresses, she uses an extremely stereotypical and racist Asian accent until the last clip is of a completely different girl who is Asian speaking Chinese.

This iteration of the trend can also be seen with the use of different races and cultures. The use of stereotypical accents and artifacts such as conical Asian hats, Ushankas (Russian fur hats), guns, and even the alcohol associated with the country–e.g., vodka being Russian–is present in many of the TikTok's. In a one of the TikTok's, an individual is mocking how their voice is "progressing" throughout their time in Thailand. The man in the video is Asian, and he starts off in a voice that seems to be his own. It is low pitched and the rate at which he talks is averagely paced. As the video progresses, the man starts to talk faster and higher pitched, while adding in a stereotypical Thai accent. The video ends with the man talking extremely fast, high-pitched, and he starts moving his arm that is not holding the phone around touching his body. This video is problematic for a multitude of different reasons. First, the use of a stereotypical Asian accent that is used to mock the people from the country. Second, this video reinforces the feminization of Asian men within the United States; Asian American men are stereotyped as weak and passive when compared to their White male counterparts. These stereotypes are produced and reinforced through Western media that never show Asian men as love interests or fathers, but waiters and housekeepers who are feminized through their comparison to strong White men (Chen, 1996). This problem also expands with stereotypes about gay Asian men as well, who are fetishized as docile, submissive, and even asexual (one who does not find pleasure in sex) to show them as other or different from the typical masculine White man (Poon & Ho, 2008). While these TikTok's may seem harmless on the surface, one that use stereotypes and assumptions as a way to get a laugh only reinforce the already existing ideals about the

communities that they are mocking. Mocking queer Asian men in a format that was created by a queer Asian man appropriates queer content to weaponize it against them.

Additionally, by reducing the process of transitioning to a video trend, the important aspects of the video and Man's journey are minimized. For example, the videos appropriating Man's format do not acknowledge the time lapses involved in Man's video. His video was filmed over one year; Man was not able to magically transform into a different version of himself after one day of being in a bathroom and changing clothes. The parody videos thus reduce not only Man's struggle, but also transgender people's struggle of constantly feeling as if they are in the wrong body and wanting to change, but not being able to due to social or physical constraints like money or medical access. This video trend also assumes that once a person is part of a culture or environment or simply consumes food from a culture that they will easily adapt to it. Again, this undermines the struggles that not only queer people face, but people of color face in constantly having to adapt within racist and homophobic systems that punish them for not fitting in correctly with society. For Man, his voice is an important part of his identity through his queerness and deafness. That importance is lost by people using the format not to support Man's struggle and the larger struggles of the trans and queer community but to mock it and reinforce the structures contributing to queer discrimination.

The ability to appropriate queer content like Man's can also help straight individuals gain a platform and become more successful from it. As of April 2022, Hatsune has 13.2 million views and 1.2 million likes on her original TikTok–almost tripling the number of views that Man has on his original video. Success on platforms such as TikTok can led to social and cultural capital, which in some instances can lead to monetized accounts and thus financial capital. While users of TikTok and appropriators of Man's format are not necessarily aiming to support the

trans community or be queer advocates, the framework of appropriative allyship may still apply in this situation because non-queer content creators are appropriating the format of a trans content creator for their own benefit and enjoyment that harms the queer community.

What does accomplice-ship and allyship look like online?

Through these examples within popular culture, social media, and the Internet there is no doubt that the categories of ally and accomplice are difficult to define. Without clear boundaries around content creation, such as a music video, and without clearly identifiable and traceable origins, and with unclear purposes and participation in advocacy, how can we advocate for being a queer accomplice in digital spaces and guard against appropriative allyship? There have been different suggestions from scholars on how to address these issues. Rogers (2006) argues for a shift toward transculturation, which characterizes appropriation as a relational act that is a natural dissolving of a "proprietary view of culture" due to globalization (p. 474). Rogers (2006) describes the transculturation perspective as seeing cultures as interconnected, constantly engaging in appropriation and transformation of culture content, instead of viewing culture "as a single, bounded essence" (p. 495). While Rogers' view of cultural appropriation through transculturation is thought-provoking, I caution against adopting this model. First, this article was written sixteen years ago and does not take into account the rise of the Internet, which further amplifies the borrowing practices and the spread of appropriative content. Second, the transculturation perspective fails to fully acknowledge the power dynamics that accompany appropriation.

Rogers (2006) himself acknowledges that "concepts like transculturation and hybridity can be deployed to delegitimize (legitimate) claims of cultural ownership by subordinated groups" (pp. 494-495). Reframing appropriation through transculturation may excuse unequal

power dynamics and may ignore why certain cultural aspects were created as a tool of survival in the first place. While I agree that appropriation is not static and it is relational, I also argue that there needs to be more responsibility when it comes from taking and/or borrowing from other cultures as a way to enrich your own, especially when such borrowing is done under the guise of support and advocacy. Therefore, I do not agree fully with Rogers' (2006) idea of being unable, or not needing, to trace the origin of things due to globalization either. While globalization and the rise of digital spaces, such as social media, does increase the difficulty of figuring out where a trend or image comes from, it is still possible. For example, sites like "Know Your Meme" help with the tracking process so people can understand from where memes and circulating images and phrases have originated.[15] Appropriation should not be excused because it may be difficult to find or understand where a trend comes from, because those images may still be promoting harmful stereotypes.

In opposition to a more fluid, globalized acceptance of appropriation, other scholars propose rigid concepts of cultural ownership where only members of in-groups can participate, share, and create content related to that group. Dogan, for example, argued to ban "digital blackface," which is "when non-Black people use the images and voices of Black individuals to explain emotions or phenomena" (quoted in Howard, 2022). Dogan's suggestion is oppositional to Rogers because it rejects the use of African American culture online by anyone who is non-Black. There are a lot of parallels between the appropriation of queer culture and African American culture. Popular media often tokenizes and commodifies certain aspects of Blackness

[15] This site (https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/this-is-my-voice) is not complete or infallible, however, as the page for "This is my Voice" memes lists the origin as "currently unknown" and does not reference Chella Man.

and queerness as a way to make their content inclusive. However, these taken aspects become stereotypes that others use to understand and make fun of queer and Black culture.

Within the digital age of gifs, TikTok, and Instagram Reels, it is easy to locate content from a variety of creators to use in one's own content. For example, by having trending audio clips available for anyone to use, a non-Black user on TikTok could easily find themselves engaging in digital blackface by using an audio clip that is trending or one of their favorite creators used. While Rogers (2006) would view this borrowing as a natural byproduct of globalization, Dogan argues that non-Black individuals should not use these gifs or audio clips because it perpetuates negative stereotypes about Black people (Howard, 2022). Dogan explains further: "Black men are seen as angry, aggressive, and violent. Those ideas came from minstrel shows [and] Black women are seen as hypersexual, angry, and as breeders" (quoted in Howard, 2022, para. 14). Dogan also supports the banning of digital blackface by discussing double standards: while a White woman can use a gif of a Black woman showing emotion, if a Black woman shows that same emotion at work, they can be fired for it. Throughout history, Black people have been used as entertainment through exaggeration and blackface and digital blackface does the same thing. It dehumanizes Black people while allowing non-Black people to profit off Blackness and temporarily adopt a Black persona for social or financial capital. According to Dogan, the solution to this problem is non-Black people to stop using gifs, videos, and audio clips of Black people altogether.

It is important to understand that Dogan's arguments are rooted in a long and violent history of blackface and the oppression that African American people faced and still face to this day due to systematic racism that creates issues like police brutality, redlining, disproportionate amounts of Black people being sent to jail, and a plethora of other issues that stem from the

history of slavery and inequality. I agree with Dogan that it is important to curtail this behavior because it can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about Black people. However, in the same way that Rogers' theoretical framework would be hard to enact, this hard line of non-Black people not being able to engage with any content featuring or created by Black individuals also seems unrealistic due to the appropriative nature of the Internet, online spaces, and social media platforms like TikTok. For example, if non-Black people cannot use a gif of Beyoncé, then are they able to create a cover of one of her songs, use a clip of her songs on an Instagram story to show an emotion, or even sing along with one of her songs?

There are certainly clear-cut cases of harmful appropriation and digital blackface that perpetuate stereotypes, but there are perhaps more innocuous uses that can promote Black artists and content creators. For example, the circulation of Jasmine Masters' famous "And I Oop" gif brought her popularity, a platform, and the ability to monetize her social media (Valdivia, 2019). While the difficultly of application alone does not invalidate an argument, the line of who gets to use what seems too murky to promote complete bans and is too problematic and pervasive to promote tacit acceptance.

Dogan's position is additionally troubling because it may foster a lack of interaction between races and cultures. It also creates a lot of questions revolving around people's intersectional identities. Are straight Black people able to take words from African American Vernacular English that were created by queer Black people, or does their use of the words also promote negative stereotypes and ignore issues that queer Black people face and still face today? This separation also ignores people that live in between worlds and cultures–people that are multi-racial, people that grew up in diverse cultures, people with disabilities, and people who occupy liminal identities or "border spaces" without a distinct sense of belonging (Anzaldúa,

1987; Flores, 1996). Therefore, the acknowledgement of intersectional perspectives and bodies is important, and is an integral component of what Johnson (2001) refers to as quare studies. Johnson (2001) notes:

> Quare studies addresses the concerns and needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people across issues of race, gender, class, and other subject positions. While attending to the discursive constitution of subjects, quare studies is also committed to theorizing the practice of everyday life. Because we exist in material bodies, we need a theory that speaks to that reality. Indeed, quare studies may breathe new life into our ‘‘dead’’ (or deadly) stratagems of survival. (p. 20)

The interconnectedness of today's world changes the way that everyone functions in daily life, including queer people. Quare studies attend to how multiply marginalized groups navigate their daily existence that may resist neat identity characters that are underlying assumptions of Dogan's arguments to restrict the use of digital content.

Deciding who can use what and who fits within what category is potentially harmful and could be characterized as a form of allyship. IAM (2014) states that, "the academic [ally] maintains institutional power above the knowledge and skill base of the community/ies in struggle. Intellectuals are most often fixated on un-learning oppression" (p. 5). Essentially, IAM (2014) argues that over discipling the rules and regulations of who is allowed to use what is inherently holding up the systems of power that academic allies claim to be fighting against. Perspectives that prevent cultural sharing and appropriation may thus limit the agency of marginalized communities as academics discipline who can and cannot do what.

If this method of "no use" was applied to the LGBTQ+ community, I wonder what the world would look like. If straight people were unable to use queer gifs, videos, audio clips, and

content in general would it be better or worse for the people in the LGBTQ+ community? The existence of shows like *Queer Eye, Pose, Will and Grace, Ellen, Queer as Folk, The L Word,* and many others would not be enjoyed by straight people who could relate to and understand queer people in a way that they may not have before. The shows would not have made as much money or got enough funding to continue, which ultimately leads to the silencing of queer voices, perspectives, and stories. LGBTQ+ culture is beautiful, and it deserves to be shared with everyone. If straight people could not use gay culture, the recent obsession with drag culture (in the form of gifs like Jasmine Masters, Dragula, and RuPaul's Drag Race) would not exist. Drag queens who have found success and started highly successful brands through their exposure to mainstream culture, like Trixie Cosmetics and KimChi Chic Beauty, would not be able to create successful and stable careers based on their skills and artistry.

Appropriation of Black culture, queer culture, and other marginalized communities is important, and I am not attempting to trivialize these issues. This idea of what the difference between appropriation and appreciation is what motivated my thesis from the very beginning. It is important to have diverse cultures seen and represented within popular media, but it is also important that those communities get the respect and attention they deserve and are not used as tools of profit for dominant culture. Neither Rogers nor Dogan's perspectives are attentive enough, in my perspective, to the nuances of appropriation, its varying circumstances, and its symbolic functions, which rhetoric is ripe to address. Instead of ignoring a piece of content's rhetorical situation, we must consider its audience, constraints, and circumstances to evaluate its potential to be cultural appropriation, and whether the appropriation is an act of allyship or accompliceship.

It is important that people respect and understand where the content they are engaging with and using comes from, and that they work as accomplices instead of allies in the fight toward equality. Of course, women should be allowed to come to gay bars and participate and appropriate queer terminology and spaces, but they also need to respect the fact that those spaces were created by and for queer people to exist without being assaulted, murdered, or arrested. The spaces have been carved out by pioneers like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, and that legacy of struggle should be respected, not mocked. Of course, men, such as Harry Styles, can wear nail polish and should if it makes them happy, but they should also understand the privilege they have to be able to be supported and not assaulted for wanting to dress more feminine in the way that many queer people before them were. Therefore, I argue that queer appropriation in digital spaces is accompliceship if it is accompanied by a respect for the culture and for direct action, as allowed in online spaces, to support queer rights. For example, someone who wishes to be a digital queer accomplice may take direct action by calling out people for homophobic tweets, not using correct pronouns in a Facebook post, or using outdated language and slurs in a YouTube video, or using racist and homophobic stereotypes in a TikTok video, among other actions that risk one's social capital to support the queer community. People who use queer culture for their own benefit or people who use it unintentionally and thereby perpetuate stereotypes can be classified as allies. Similar to Taylor Swift's appropriative allyship covered in the previous chapter, digital allies may directly benefit, socially and fiscally, from using queer culture within their content and taking cultural markers from the queer community.

This love of queer culture is a good thing, but it needs to be analyzed critically based on the circumstances, user, audience, and purpose. Instead of banning non-queer people from using gifs and videos that feature queer creators, we should hold users and appropriators accountable to

supporting the community that they love and take from. IAM (2014) states that accomplices "find creative ways to weaponize their privilege" (p. 6). If a person loves drag race, they need to have the hard conversations with others in their circle about why hegemonic masculinity is toxic, why pronouns and gender expression is important, and why the silencing of the queer community is dangerous. Instead of centering themselves, queer accomplices need to listen to the community and educate themselves on queer issues and history when appropriating queer content and couple their appropriation with advocacy.

Accomplices can show support by raising awareness of queer issues (such as Bad Bunny in "Yo Perreo Sola"), volunteering at LGBTQ+ centers, becoming a volunteer crisis support counselor through The Trevor Project, or even donating to LGBTQ+ charities. IAM (2014) specifically focuses on the importance of direct action; an Instagram story should be paired with additional offline support where possible. As with anything, it is important that people are critically engaging with the content they use. Queer creators, as well as people of color and other creators with intersectional identities, should be given the proper credit they deserve through social and/or financial capital. Through critical engagement, people should be able to understand the rhetorical situation surrounding a piece of content and the proper ways to engage with it. In the case of Chella Man's video, an individual should understand why it is not okay to make a video that reinforces negative stereotypes about queer Asian men when Chella Man is a queer Asian man fighting against negative stereotypes and false dichotomies through his own visibility and journey. It is important to promote critical reflection in digital spaces and in the sharing of memes to understand if the message that is being promoted through the content is helpful or hurtful.

Understanding what true accompliceship online looks like is difficult. However, there have been examples of online activism that have used certain social media affordances, like hashtags and copyright systems, as a way to take action in digital and offline spaces. When the hashtag #ProudBoys was being used to promote the neo-fascist exclusively male organization, queer men took to social media and took over the hashtag with pictures of themselves, pictures of them kissing their partners, and other images that promoted gay men as "proud boys." Through digital direct action, queer men were able to take over the hashtag and fight against the hate group. There was potential risk in sharing queer content of themselves and loved ones and for accomplices similarly to participate in a striking display of queer affection on a hashtag that also circulated messages of toxic masculinity and White supremacy (Elassar, 2020).

Another example of direct action organized online is when K-pop fans overloaded a Dallas Police Department's app that was being used to stop the #BlackLivesMatter protests. Instead of sending in videos and pictures of people protesting as requested by the police, K-pop fans overloaded and shut down the app by uploading videos of their favorite celebrities or fancams. Offline, people are encouraged to play Disney music when being interviewed by alt-right groups or individuals or at rallies to prevent them from ending up online and being shared. Since Disney has an extremely strict copyright protections, whenever a person uploads or attempts to upload anything related to Disney music, it automatically gets taken down due to pre-existing systems in place that automatically flag copyrighted content.

Through working within the existing framework of societal constraints as well as virtual constraints and affordances, these actions are engaging in refraction, a feminist rhetorical strategy of appropriation, because they are using those constraints to their advantage (Shugart, 1997). The initial cultural and technological artifacts were left intact, such as hashtags, copyright

protections, and apps, but people were able to "jam" those technologies and repurpose them (Harold, 2004). Why is a hate group allowed to find community through social media through a hashtag and/or why are the police able to use social media as a way to punish those supporting racial equality? The refraction showcases those questions and features of power that are normalized (Shugart, 1997). By flooding the hashtag #ProudBoys with queer content, activists play directly against their ideals because queer men do not fit within the typical ideals of hegemonic masculinity supported by the Proud Boys (Sloop, 2000; Trujillo, 1991; Warner, 2000). Through direct action, these social media users are performing a form of digital accompliceship. They are using their social media platform in a more direct way; the queer men are also engaging in risk by outing themselves directly on social media and putting themselves in the way of an alt-right hate group. When looking to make meaningful change through an accomplice frame, once must take direct action and involve meaningful risk while respecting queer culture.

Conclusion

Through conducting this research and examining different cultural artifacts, it was much easier to apply the ally versus accomplice framework to a music video instead of a TikTok trend. For celebrities and music videos, there are specific solutions and critiques that can be applied to future videos or songs. However, TikTok trends are the combination of so many different people and changes, that it becomes much more challenging to provide one plan or solution that solves all the problems that come with it. This is why I use the theory and framework from Rogers (2006), IAM (2014) and Dogan (2021). Rogers (2006) explanation of transculturation is important because it looks at appropriation as more than just a static rhetorical effect that only happens once. I completely agree with Rogers' (2006) definition of approbation as relational and

dialectal; however, he does not spend enough time explaining the possible effects of power that is a foundational part of appropriation. This is why IAM's (2014) ally versus accomplice framework is so important; this framework focuses on power and how appropriation can be harmful to marginalized groups. If appropriation becomes too normalized, then it will continue to allow those who profit off of allyship and appropriation to take advantage of those marginalized communities instead of helping them. The internet is a place that creates a perfect environment for appropriation. Through the confines and characteristics of digital landscapes, it makes find a solution to these questions and problems about appropriation difficult. It makes being an accomplice online instead of an ally even more difficult. The difficulty of these questions and problems lead some to argue that appropriation is inevitable, and that it should excused through a lens of communal creation that ignores history and the power dynamics that exists within appropriation. On the other side of the argument, appropriation is seen as inherently negative due to a strong emphasis on power and historical events of oppression and mockery. People who are not part of the communities they are taking from, such as queer and Black culture, are able to take certain aspects the culture as they like, but when it is no longer trendy or beneficial to them, they can take it off, thereby only temporarily "playing at" being a member of a marginalized community. Queer and Black people cannot take off their culture, although they can attempt to "pass" as a survival technique. Therefore it is extremely important to respect and take into account the way that power shapes the way that appropriation is used everywhere, but specifically within digital spaces where accountability can be difficult to trace and uphold. By taking a path that exists between the two, I propose supporting appropriation when it respects, benefits, and listens to those queer folk who are creating the content. This approach attends to the unequal power dynamics of appropriation, but also allows those who are not part of the

community the opportunity to engage with the content and become accomplices in the fight against homophobia and heteronormativity.

Concluding Thoughts on Queer Appropriation and Digital Rhetoric

This research engages the complex and blurred concept of appropriation. In the same way that communication and rhetoric are ever-expanding, so is appropriation because it is an integral part of how we relate to one another, structure our own identities, and navigate our lived experiences. The ways in which we communicate, what we communicate, and the meaning given to the symbols that shape communication are all appropriated and borrowed from others, thereby making appropriation fundamentally communicative. Within daily communication, we cannot forget the many hegemonies, oppressive ideologies, and power dynamics that discipline marginalized groups' language use, expressions of culture, and even safety. This research has examined the features of appropriation and how can appropriation be beneficial and harmful and even a combination of both. Appropriation is a powerful communicative act that is only becoming more relevant and pervasive in digital spaces.

Specifically, I address appropriation in digital spaces. The Internet is a constantly evolving environment, and through different digital platforms like social media and music videos, individuals are able to interact with a wide variety of content and content producers and put that material to various purposes, from self-benefit to meaningful change. Digital interactions can cause a huge shift that is able to position individuals as online celebrities and personalities who are able to directly transform their social capital into physical and financial capital through these spaces. The Internet is a messy place; it has completely reimagined the way that individuals communicate with one another through ease of access and efficiency, but it has also created change in the ways that people are able to communicate their own identity both online and in person.

This thesis has examined the dynamics of digital appropriation and how interconnected everyone is, making the evaluation of appropriation difficult, but not impossible. I rhetorically analyzed two music videos that were created by prominent, cisgender, and straight music artists to examine their relationship with queer appropriation. Through examining how the appropriation of queer culture, content, and identity influences their own content and careers as artists through their music videos, I demonstrated how appropriation can function rhetorically–in both negative and positive ways through adapting IAM's (2014) framework of ally versus accomplice. I analyzed how Taylor Swift engages with queer content and appropriates queer culture in ways that are self-serving, lack risk-tasking, and fail to challenge hegemonic norms, thereby categorizing her music video, "You Need to Calm Down" as appropriative allyship. Conversely, Bad Bunny's music video, "Yo Perreo Sola" foregrounds the LGBTQ+ community and their struggles and disrupts hegemonic masculinity and machismo through being an accomplice instead of an ally.

I attempted to do the same analysis with different artifacts found through social media platforms, posts, and examples but was not satisfied with any example I found. There were very few examples, if any, that showed how a person could be an accomplice through social media that was not shrouded in performative allyship that only looked to benefit themselves fiscally and socially. This led to y larger discussion about the messiness of online spaces and the interconnectedness of today's world. Rogers (2006) refers to this process as transculturation; the world is so interconnected that the way appropriation functions is different. This definition of appropriation is lacking in terms of recognizing the power that appropriation holds situationally and historically. Individuals need to be held accountable when attempting to take the identity and culture of a marginalized group to commodify it online for social and financial capital. On the

other side of the spectrum, restricting nonqueer people from engaging with queer content is not beneficial either. Queer people need accomplices to fight with us instead of sitting by because they are too afraid to interact with queerness at all. Chella Man's video is a perfect example that shows the influence that queer culture has on the Internet, but it also shows the Internet's ability to erase where the format came from in the first place. This is why it is important for people to critically engage with content before using it. If the millions of people who engaged with the format after it was appropriated understood that it came from a transgender, deaf, Jewish, Chinese man, then they may have interacted with it differently and more respectfully. Even the harmful and racist appropriations, however, still increased the visibility of Man and helped to grow his platform faster and larger while also helping those who see representation through Man.

As the Internet is one of the most prominent sources of information and networking, it is so important that individuals understand and attend to appropriation of marginalized communities, including the queer community, in these spaces. From a communicative standpoint, the Internet has completely changed the way that people interact with one another. Instead of talking or typing, people communicate through gifs, videos (TikToks and Instagram Reels), and emojis that exist within a realm of both verbal and nonverbal communication. When someone quotes or uses a TikTok, they are appropriating someone else's words, voice, and thoughts. However, those same words and thoughts that are already inherently infused with meaning and symbols get infused with even more meaning that is created by users on a social media platform and are changed to fit different contexts and topics. Those symbols thus get reused but applied to different contexts that can create a completely different product as seen through the use of Man's video format. Music videos communicate statements, intentionally or unintentionally, to the audience who is watching them through both the words that are being

sung and visuals included in tandem with the words. While one person can be moved by the solidarity that Swift is showing by creating a completely queer themed music video, the same person can be frustrated and upset through its performative activism and tokenism of queer figures. The effects of these cultural artifacts are inherently rhetorical as well because they all create meaning that is communicated by the creator of the content and the audience who is engaging with the content.

These artifacts also show the ways in which sex, gender and sexuality is constantly disciplined through communication. The use of drag as a tool for disrupting the way in which one understands gender is a common theme within the paper. By artists like Bad Bunny dressing up in drag, he is showing the ways in which gender is communicated and is rhetorically constructed and disciplined. The simple existence of queer people, such as Man, also break and queer binaries because they do not fit perfectly within either. The concepts of sex, sexuality, and gender are complex, and the Internet provides opportunities for experimentation, expression, and also exploitation. By adding these complexities with the complexities of digital spaces and the Internet, communication plays an even more important role in understanding how these different aspects of identity are communicated, disciplined, maintained, and changed. As my analysis shows, there is no simple, clear-cut way to evaluate appropriation, but I have proposed IAM's (2014) ally vs accomplice framework, in conversation with feminist rhetorical theory and queer theory, to navigate these complexities.

This research only touches the surface of the work that needs to be done in regards to appropriation. Through attempting to define what appropriation is and how it functions rhetorically, I am attempting to create a consistent definition of appropriation, so it can be evaluated and challenged or upheld depending on whether it is ally or accomplice-based

respectively. There is also an assumption that appropriation is a completely negative communicative process, but I argue that when queer appropriation is used through an accomplice framework, one can create legitimate change. If this conversation, definition, and framework could be applied to other communities it would be helpful in creating new research that reshapes the way one engages with the concept of appropriation.

Additionally, other marginalized communities may adopt/adapt this framework. The way in which queer appropriation functions may well by very different than other marginalized communities, but the work and research created from these examinations would continue to be useful in understanding how appropriation functions within a digital context. Lateral appropriation can be a useful concept to analyze how gay culture often takes from African American culture, which could be a meaningful extension of this project in my future work. There are also millions of artifacts that could be examined to help enrich the way that communication, rhetoric, and appropriation exist within a digital and technological context as well. I also invite others to engage with the question of how to foster accomplices instead of allies, especially online. It is important to have individuals who are not part of the community becoming educated accomplices that create change in spaces where queer people do not have access to. IAM's (2014) ally versus accomplice framework is significantly important to creating a digital landscape that is able to celebrate queerness and diverse cultures and perspectives through respect, direct action, and commitments to one another.

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Curriculum Vitae

Derek Viruez Bryant
Las Vegas, Nevada 89005 ● derekviruez@gmail.com

Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada May 2022

Degree: Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Activities:

- Graduate Teaching Assistant

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho May 2020

Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies - Cum Laude

Activities:

- Varsity League of Legends Team, Crafting For a Cause

Southeast Career Technical Academy, Las Vegas, Nevada June 2016

Degree: Advanced High School Diploma; **Major:** Website Apps Interactive Media

Activities:

- Applications Club, Volleyball, SkillsUSA, Student Tutor

Certifications 2016, 2020

- Leadership and Human Relations (2020)
- Career Technical Education Certification (2016)

Skills and Interests

Software Skills

- Photoshop CS6, HTML5, XHTML, JavaScript, CSS3, Microsoft Office Programs, Google Office Programs, Search Engine Optimization, Mobile App Design, JQuery, Bluehost

Interpersonal Skills

- Effective communication, leadership, office management, socio-cultural competency, conflict management and mediation through relationship navigation, active listening, negotiation, nonverbal analysis, communication with diverse groups, workplace empathy, rapport building

Special interests

- Rhetoric, digital spaces, queer studies, intersectionality, research and analysis, power and privilege, advocacy, indigenous methodology, linguistic ethnography, eSports, popular culture, teaching, organization, popular culture content analysis, analyzing intrapersonal communication, group community, affinity spaces, sport culture

Experience

Graduate Teaching Assistant May 2020 - May 2022

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada

- Enabled students to successfully learn about public speaking and communicative skills
- Navigated teaching students both online and in person through Canvas and classroom spaces
- Mediated student requests, questions, concerns, and other duties through email as well as online and in person meetings
- Performed duties such as grading speeches and assignments while also giving constructive feedback in order to see improvement from students
- Inspired multiple groups of students to appreciate the nuances of communication and communicative based skills

Intercultural Communication Teaching Assistant January 2020 - May 2020

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho

- Identified how to conduct indigenous methodology through examining Dr. Castaneda's own published work and formulating my own
- Co-authored curriculum for fourteen weeks for twenty students in order to create

curriculum that was relevant

- Instructed multiple different lectures about things related to intercultural communication

Boise State Writing Center August 2018 - May 2020

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho

- Facilitated open dialogue with diverse and multilingual undergraduate and graduate students
- Collaborated with 40 co-workers, 6 graduate assistants, and one boss in a fast-paced environment
- Led workplace presentations for undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff of Boise State University
- Advocated and managed in a stressful environment with both students and co-workers through conflict management and workshops.

Varsity League of Legends Team August 2016 - August 2019

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho

- Coordinated different strategies and plans with a group of four other players throughout multiple environments
- Organized Boise State University's first varsity collegiate eSports team
- Developed critical thinking through twelve-hour practices per week, video review, watching higher level play, and tournaments
- Perceptive decision making in high risk and competitive environments in order to aid teammates
- Represented Boise State University's eSports program and upheld university values, standards, and ethics across the country
- Established an on-going program for Boise State University students to experience, learn, and participate in eSports

Shift Supervisor August 2020 - Present

Starbucks Coffee Company, Henderson, Nevada

- Confidently runs shifts will creating and maintaining the Starbucks experience for both customers and fellow partners
- References the Daily Coverage Report, Daily Plan, and Operations Station to determine what needs to be accomplished during my shift
- Coaching partners by explaining and demonstrating how to make drinks to standard while also noticing mistakes and correcting behaviors
- Demonstrating responsibility by upholding Starbucks' missions and values by modeling behaviors and standards for other partners to see
- Communicates important information to the next shift supervisor or store manager
- Conducting inventory counts, balancing tills, counting the safe, depositing money, closing the store, and clean play
- Received "Greener Apron" certification as well as Partner of the Quarter

Shift Runner July 2014 - March 2016

Domino's Pizza, Boulder City, Nevada

- Initiated self-control in opening and closing and maintained a work schedule with 10 employees and 3 shift managers.
- Inspected register upon opening and closing hours, updated books, split tips among employees, cashed drivers out, submitted timecards in an orderly and on-time manner
- Maintained store hygiene, inventory, and informed managers of any declining supplies
- Addressed customer concerns, problem-solved conflicts, communicated orders to staff members, and up-held company standards at all times
- Ensured that food was prepared during times of the day that were not busy in order to facilitate seamlessness.

Website Design Intern August 2014 - June 2016

Southeast Career Technical Academy Website Design Department, Las Vegas, Nevada

- Improved established relational databases with usability methods to reach a multitude of audiences

- Met with a variety of clients that were looking for websites to be built based upon their requirements and styles
- Designed and developed SQL databases based on clients' needs and instructions

Academic Achievements

- "I'm a Siren: The Rhetorical Effects of Team Siren's Announcement Video." Fall 2020, Communication 711, Dr. Bloomfield
- "A Qualitative Study of Queer Men, Instagram, and Fitness Hashtags" Spring 2022, Communication 632, Dr. Rice
- "The Rhetoric of Science and the Controversy of Conversion Therapy" Fall 2021, Communication 618, Dr. Bloomfield
- "How Code-Switching Applies to Communication." Fall 2020, Communication 710, Dr. McManus
- "The Lack of Recycling Infrastructure in Nevada" Spring 2022, Communication 641, Dr. Bloomfield
- "The Importance of Autoethnography Within Organizational Communication." Fall 2020, Communication 789 Dr. Rice
- "Can Coming Out of the Closet Get Any Harder?" Spring 2021, Communication 712 Dr. Pennington
- "Burke and Social Media Influencers." Spring 2021, Communication 730 Dr. Conley
- "Code-Switching Autoethnography." Spring 2020, Communication 498, Dr. McClellan
- "Queer Social Media Research." Spring 2020, Independent, Dr. Hutchinson
- "Does Gaydar Exist?" Summer 2019, Communication 341, Professor Phillips
- "Rhetorical Uses of the LGBTQ+ Community." Spring 2017, English 102, Professor Meeks
- "Adpocalypse: Youtube's Biggest Fault." Fall 2018, Business Communication 201, Professor Sherman
- "Varsity eSports: The New Wave of Collegiate Student Athletes" Fall 2018, English 303, Director Keith
- "In a Galaxy Owned by Disney." Spring 2019, Dispute 401, Professor Corkill
- "The Effects of Gender and Instagram." Fall 2019, Communication 302, Dr. Kang
- Voces Valientes Project." Fall 2019, Media 302, Dr. Castaneda

- “Understanding Biphobia and Bi-Erasure.” Spring 2018, University Foundations 200, Professor Jensen