

# Team Ayeeee

## Week 13 - Queer Rhetorics

### Sara Ahmed - Yvonne

Bio:

- Currently a feminist writer and independent scholar
- PhD in Critical and Cultural Theory (in addition to other degrees English, Philosophy, and History)
- Until the end of 2016 – a Professor of Race and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London (resigned in protest at their failure to deal with the problem of sexual harassment)
- Ahmed has worked in several other institutions and for themes such as queer theory, feminism, and race studies
- Partner: Sarah Franklin, an academic at the University of Cambridge; they currently live near Cambridge

Key Texts:

- feministkilljoys – her research blog – <https://feministkilljoys.com/>
- *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) – a book closely linked to the blog (begun and written at the same time) and which focuses on everyday experiences and rethinking key aspects of feminist theory
- *Willful Subject* – explores willfulness
- *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* – wherein Ahmed discusses and critiques the university, racism, and diversity
- “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology” (2006) – one her many, many articles, “Orientations” includes the concept of orientation, queer studies, and phenomenology

Rhetorical Superpowers:

- Feminist kill joy
- Drawing feminist theory from everyday life and experiences
- Queer studies
- Race studies, including fighting sexual harassment
- How things, like power, take shape in the world and institutional cultures

Frenemies:

- The University – this is because of Ahmed resigning her post in protest at how institutions (Goldsmiths, in this particular case) deal with the problem of sexual harassment
- Nevertheless, Ahmed has claimed she will still work as an independent scholar *on* the university (to fight things like this), even if she does not work *at* the university

### Impact:

- Works at “the intersection of feminist, queer and race studies” (<https://www.saranahmed.com/bio-cv>)
- Her research focuses on “how bodies and worlds take shape; and how power is secured and challenged in everyday life worlds as well as institutional cultures” (<https://www.saranahmed.com/bio-cv>)
- Prolific writer with many projects, books, and articles
- Ahmed describes how the “university has become my field” after her resignation from Goldsmiths – how she is still working on it, even though she is not working at the university
- “Speaking Out” (2016) – Ahmed’s blog post about her resignation: <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/02/speaking-out/>

### Quote:

- “I am a feminist killjoy. It is what I do. It is how I think. It is my philosophy and my politics.” (“feministkilljoys”)

### Discussion Questions:

- How would you describe phenomenology? After reading Ahmed’s work, what is your understanding of queer phenomenology?
- What does it mean to be oriented? Ahmed offered things like sexual orientation, queer bodies, and even political orientations, but how else do we use orientation?
- Let’s discuss the university institution and dealing with sexual harassment, keeping in mind Ahmed’s primary focuses of queer theory, feminism, and race studies.

### Sources:

- <https://www.saranahmed.com/bio-cv>
- <https://feministkilljoys.com/>
- <https://www.saranahmed.com/books-1>
- <https://feministkilljoys.com/2016/06/02/speaking-out/>

## Michael Warner - LaKela

### Warner’s “What’s Wrong with Normal?”

- \* 1986 PhD graduate of John Hopkins University
- \* Yale professor (2007-Present) and literary critic
- \* Author of “Publics and Counterpublics”(2002)-Reading from Banks’s Fall 2018 Literacy course
- Work ranges from American culture to sexuality, politics, and publics

<https://english.yale.edu/people/tenured-and-tenure-track-faculty-professors/michael-warner>

Primary issue of stigma

Attempts to combat stigma so extreme that affect is unintended and subject to more critique or harm for insiders

Article reminds me of Occupy Wallstreet Movt. A few instructors discussed how the movt faltered because of its lack of agreement from within about its cause and objectives

Notes for Discussion

- Use of example (Hero magazine (1997-2001)-American pub., now British, among others)
- Sarcastic terminology to prove a point (dyke, clone, troll)-52
- Rhetorical questions about what is normal, why normal, etc.
  
- American Monicathon (41)
- Stigmaphile, stigmaphobe (43)
- Sexual McCarthyism (45)
- Cataclysmic (55)
- Abject (66)
- Publics and counterpublics (63, 68)-Fall literacy course with Banks
- Stultifying (70)
- Tendentious (71)
- Ethos (75, 76, 78)
- Simulacrum (78)
- Normal schools (56)
- Post-gay (61-62)
- Matthew Shepard's death (63)

Quotes

"The gay and lesbian movement is American's longest-running sex scandal (45).

"By national standards...embarrassment became a permanent condition of its politics" (49).

"You learn that the people who look most different from you can be...the very people from whom you have the most to learn" (70).

"Against assimilation, one can insist that the dominant culture assimilate to queer culture, not the other way around" (74),

Questions

Some movements contradict themselves in an attempt to explain what they are not. However, this contradiction might also be an attempt of the oppressed to use the very tools of their oppressors to regain power. Should we consider Collard's "post-gay" stance and Newsweek editorial simply an attempt to either appease outsiders or to convince the insiders of the gay

movement? Or, to return to Powell's "Rhetorics of Survivance," how might Collard's words be considered an attempt to recreate presence for those associated with the movement?

On pages 47-48, Warner addresses how members within the gay movement reenact behaviors that the group rejects. This reenactment of the behaviors we want people to dissociate with our identities, based on our membership with a group, seems counterproductive. However, a capitalistic society built on violence and greed shows us that this type behavior is "normal." Since Warner explains that normal is no preferable than abnormal, how do we effectively model being change agents for students in an institution that emphasizes normal as acceptable?

Warner refers to Goffman's coined terms, stigmaphile and stigmaphobe (43) to separate outsiders of the gay movement into two major divisions. Twenty years after Warner's article, are these two terms still relevant for describing our cultural perceptions regarding stigma? What other terms/considerations might account for the progress of our society?

## **Erin J. Rand - Zac**

"Inflammatory"-

- Rhetorical agency is the capacity for words and actions to be intelligible and forceful, and to create effects through their formal and stylistic conventions" (abstract)
- Notes that agency is often attributed to the "rhetor" or the "text," but that there is a certain "tension" when attempting to attribute that to form. Rand "suggest[s] that the formal features of texts enable agency. In contrast to an understanding of rhetorical agency as the ability of rhetors or texts to act, I view rhetorical agency as the capacity for words and/or actions to come to make sense and therefore to create effects Larry Kramer, Polemics, and Rhetorical Agency through their particular formal and stylistic conventions" (299-300).
- the polemical form:
  - alienating expressions of emotion,
  - non-contingent assertions of truth,
  - presumptions of shared morality,
  - the constitution of enemies, audiences, and publics
- "The academic uptake of Kramer's polemical discourse therefore demonstrates that form enables but does not determine a text's effects, and highlights the gap between the rhetorical act and effectivity" (311)
- "The academic uptake of Kramer's polemical discourse therefore demonstrates that form enables but does not determine a text's effects, and highlights the gap between the rhetorical act and effectivity" (312)
- "It is precisely the emphasis on the potential for failure, the unpredictability of effects, and the risky nature of acting that I am claiming as the queerness of agency. Queerness appears as the general economy of undecidability from

which agency emerges; as one modality of agency, then, rhetorical agency has queerness as its very condition of possibility” (314)

## Jack Halberstam - Emily

- “Introduction: Low Theory” from Halberstam’s work in *The Queer Art of Failure*
- Inspired by work of Stuart Hall
- “This book uses ‘low theory’ (a term I am adapting from Stuart Hall’s work) and popular knowledge to explore alternatives and to look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations. Low theory tries to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hook of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop” (2).
- “I argue that success in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation” (2).
  - How do we see this play out rhetorically?
- “...the negative thinker can use the experience of failure to confront the gross inequalities of everyday life in the United States” (4).
  - How are we seeing this being/not being done?
- Relation to work of Foucault
- Examples Halberstam provides
  - Spongebob Squarepants
  - Little Miss Sunshine
  - Monsters, Inc. + the work of Pixar
  - Do these examples work as rhetorical devices? Are they effective? What other examples might we be able to use for “low theory” or other explanations of Halberstam’s work?