

“PROUD TO BE AUTISTIC”: GRETA THUNBERG’S QUEERING RHETORICAL GENRE IN CLIMATE CHANGE ADVOCACY

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Greta Thunberg, a young, autistic climate change activist from Sweden, has generated mixed opinions about her rhetoric since her #FridaysForFuture climate movement that started in 2018. Many people have found her inspiring, leading youth around the world to protest political inaction about climate change. Many autistic people have also found power in Thunberg’s fearless identification as an autistic person. However, there are people who stand strongly against her rhetoric and her autistic identity. Michael Knowles, podcast host from the *Daily News*, commented that Thunberg is “mentally ill,” and former U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that Thunberg should enhance her “Anger Management.” Previous studies have analyzed Thunberg’s rhetoric, partially explaining the controversy and power of her rhetoric. Nevertheless, they don’t pay sustained attention to the role of Thunberg’s autistic identity in choosing her rhetorical strategies. My research focuses on the role of Thunberg’s autistic identity in making her rhetoric controversial yet powerful. I base my research on the framework of genre as social action pioneered by Carolyn Miller and queering rhetoric pioneered by Remi Yergeau. I have found that by both conforming to and queering, which is exploring untraditional possibilities, expectations for the genre of epideictic political speeches, Thunberg redefines the exigence of immediate climate change action for the audience. In her political speeches, Thunberg distances herself from her immediate audience instead of creating identifications with them to create the exigence of immediate climate change action instead of submitting to political inaction. My findings also raise future research questions about how to accommodate neurodivergent students in classroom settings, how to better teach the concept of rhetorical genre, and how neurodivergent rhetors can explore more rhetorical possibilities.

“You have aroused the world. I’m very grateful to you.”

—Sir David Attenborough, BBC manager, BBC News

“Greta must work on her Anger Management Problem.”

—Donald Trump, former president of the United States, Twitter

“She may have just been one person in the beginning, but she had a belief, a mission, and a belief to do something not just for herself, but for everyone.”

—Prince Harry, member of the British royal family, YouTube

“Greta Thunberg is mentally ill.”

—Michael Knowles, reporter at the Daily Wire, Fox News

Since 2018, Greta Thunberg has gained worldwide renown as a child climate activist. By this point, many have heard of her school strike movement #FridaysForFuture and her audacious punchline to politicians “How dare you!” As the epigraphs illustrate, comments on her are divided. Despite the criticism she received for her severe denouncement of political leaders, her suggested climate change practices that many consider impractical, and her autistic identity, Thunberg is also powerful. More and more young activists have gathered to call for climate change action, generating the “Greta Thunberg Effect” (Sabherwal et al.).

Thunberg’s effectiveness at amplifying climate messages and mobilizing citizens has prompted several studies of her rhetoric. In existing research on Thunberg’s rhetoric, however, few have paid sustained attention to her autistic identity. Renea Frey explains the effects that Thunberg achieves by using *parrhesia*, the ability to speak out truth in public despite potential risk. Audrey Schroeder’s blog post analyzes the importance of Thunberg’s repeatedly used rhetorical question “how dare you?” However, their research focuses on Thunberg’s rhetorical strategies, paying less attention to her identity and agency as to why and how she harnesses such strategies and the implications

of her strategies for neurodivergent people. More recently, Sarah Bach’s study addresses this gap by focusing extensively on Thunberg’s agency and identity as a child activist. She situates Thunberg’s rhetoric in an ecology of climate change discourse, highlighting Thunberg’s choices in her child rhetoric as opposed to the rhetoric traditionally accepted by adults: she combats historical climate change action, amplifies the audience’s awareness of political inaction instead of solely focusing on imparting climate science, and puts more emphasis on justice and equity in the climate change issue. These strategies have helped Thunberg, despite her identity as a child, achieve her rhetorical power of spreading climate change awareness. Bach’s research, however, is limited to Thunberg’s child identity primarily, downplaying her autistic rhetoric, which is controversial yet powerful. This omission raises an important and unaddressed question: How has Thunberg’s autistic identity influenced her use of a rhetoric that is different yet powerful?

To understand Thunberg’s autistic rhetoric, I draw on Remi Yergeau’s theory of “neurological queerness” in combination with rhetorical genre studies (RGS), pioneered by Carolyn Miller. RGS theorizes genres not as fixed categories but as flexible cultural and cognitive categories that shape both rhetors’ and audience’s

understandings of exigences. Both restrictive and creative, genres emerge from similar responses to repeated rhetorical situations while inviting variations created by different rhetors. Although autistic people are assumed to be arhetorical because of their presumed asociality (Yergeau 60), Yergeau argues that they can “queer” (3) such rhetoric by exploring the traditionally ignored rhetorical possibilities. In Thunberg’s political speeches, I have found that Thunberg queers traditional rhetoric by 1) using the genre as social action, reshaping the audience’s understanding of the climate change action as more urgent and relevant, and 2) adding variations to the existing genre to further the audience’s understanding of the exigence and find potential courses of action.

Using this framework, I aim to answer the missing element in previous research: how Thunberg harnesses her autistic power by adding variations to the existing rhetorical genre for climate change advocacy, which is the epideictic political speeches genre. To shed light on this question, I focus on one of Thunberg’s most important genres for analysis—her epideictic political speeches—selecting public speeches at political forums where Thunberg addresses a global audience in English and in her own words. In these performances, Thunberg queers neurotypical rhetoric by adding variations to the genre of epideictic political speeches, bravely illustrating her autistic identity and agency in the rhetorical situation to combat traditional inaction about climate change and neurotypical assumptions about autistic rhetors. More creatively, Thunberg responds to the exigence of immediate climate

action raised in her own political speeches with the genre of advocacy microblogs, using an inviting rhetoric to encourage collective action against political inaction, which will not be displayed thoroughly in this essay. Through these strategies, Thunberg challenges both the norms of rhetoric and the stereotypes against autistic rhetors, opening ways of acting in the world for marginalized people, especially in the realm of scholarship, where neurodivergent students can be excluded by the neurotypical teaching style.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: QUEERING RHETORIC THROUGH GENRE AS SOCIAL ACTION

To evaluate the role of Thunberg’s autistic identity in her rhetorical strategies, I draw on rhetorical genre studies along with Yergeau’s theory of “neurological queerness.”

As Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson argue, a rhetorical genre emerges from the repetitive rhetorical norms in a set of recurring situations. The term “rhetorical situation” was initially theorized by Lloyd Bitzer in “The Rhetorical Situation,” where he defines rhetorical situation as “a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance...and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character” (5). Bitzer contends that rhetoric responds to pre-existing rhetorical situations. However, a rhetor’s rhetoric is not always passively controlled by the situation. Richard Vatz later theorizes further agency of rhetors by stating that

“no situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it” (154). In his response to Bitzer, he argues that meaning is created by the choices rhetors make to interpret the events in the situation, and it is only after rhetors make such choices that the events gain “salience” (157), or “exigence,” the necessity to rhetorize for the situation. Miller responds to both Bitzer and Vatz by reframing exigences as neither purely subjective of rhetors nor purely controlled by rhetorical situations. They are “a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes...an objectified social need” (“Genre as Social Action” 157). This understanding transitions to Miller’s argument that rhetorical genres can be used as social action. A rhetorical genre is a cognitive typification for the audience to organize recurring experiences and perceive new exigences, “mediating private intentions and social exigence...connect[ing] the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent” (Miller, “Genre as Social Action” 163)

Miller’s argument of genre as social action raises questions on how to use genre to better shape the audience’s understanding of exigences. Rhetorical genres are restrictive as they emerge from typifications of rhetoric. However, as Amy Devitt argues, they can also be creative because language and social standards are infinitely diverse (140). Thus, rhetors, as individuals from different combinations of backgrounds, can add to existing genres their unique variations (Devitt 149). That said, some genres allow for more variation than others. Miller later argues, for example, that “administered”

and “institutional” genres, which are tied to institutions, can be more “regulated” and “regularized” than “vernacular” genres, such as social media genres (“Where Do Genres Come From” 24-5).

Autistic rhetoric, in fact, operates by adding variations to existing genres while harnessing audiences’ shared understandings of their exigences and social actions. In their book *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*, Yergeau recounts their experience as an autistic rhetorician when professionals in the field have implied that autistic people are not capable of being rhetorical (5). Autistic behaviors are said to be “lacking in meaning, purpose, or social value” (15). Autistic people are thus often misunderstood as nonhuman (6). In part due to this line of thinking, non-autistic narrators have “helped” to narrate stories for autists, presenting them as objects without agency, responding to the illusory exigence of curing autism (7). Recent works, however, have pointed out that autistic people are rhetorical. In Yergeau’s terms, autistic people achieve their rhetoric by “queering” neurotypical rhetorics (3). They borrow the word “queer” from gender studies, as neurodivergent and queer people both suffer from social stigmatization that aims at diminishing their queerness from the root. Queerness, instead of a disability that needs curing, is a process of “reclaiming one’s capacity to give more full expression to one’s neurodivergence” (Walker qtd. in Yergeau 86), and thus gives less represented people a unique ability to rhetorize in their own ways. Unlike traditional rhetoric, queering rhetoric rejects a clear definition (93): it is an exploration that

helps neurodivergent people find their own rhetorical practices, rebelling against the assumptions of neurodivergent people as rhetorical, refusing to fully submit to existing rhetorical genres.

Combining the two lines of studies in genre as social action and the autistic queering of rhetoric, I argue that Thunberg's autistic identity allows her to create variations in existing rhetorical genres and harness genres as social action for her own ends. Thunberg harnesses the epideictic aspect of political speeches by answering the social expectations for the genre. An epideictic speech, defined by Aristotle, is a speech that focuses on "solidifying the values of its audience" (Fahnestock 278-9) without comprehensively and deliberately explaining the process of its logic, which, according to Martin Reisiigl in their *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, is a significant component of political speeches because of their emphasis on delivering values to the audience (244). Thunberg thus fiercely condemns political inaction and instills into the mindset of the audience that climate change is serious and urgent. Not stopping there, Thunberg queers the traditional rhetorical genre of epideictic political speeches at diplomatic forums such as the United Nations (UN), which creates identification with the audience by making moderate arguments with socially accepted expressions and marketing oneself as neurotypical and thus authoritative. In contrast, Thunberg adds variations to the genre to deliver her speeches in an epideictic way: she displays her autistic identity and distinguishes herself from the immediate audience

of politicians while engaging her mediated audience online to engage in a panicky, autistic mindset about climate change, thus creating the exigence for immediate climate action from average citizens.

Therefore, through both conforming and adding variations to the genre of political speeches, Thunberg engages the audience in the social action of redefining the exigence of climate change action. She also creatively uses her Twitter advocacy microblogs genre to answer the exigence raised in her political speeches, which includes providing guidance and leading actual action from her audience of neurodivergent and other marginalized activists. My research will focus on Thunberg's queering of the political speeches genre as social action to raise the exigence of urgent climate change action.

POLITICAL SPEECHES: QUEERING DIPLOMATIC RHETORIC WITH FEARLESS HONESTY

Thunberg derives a significant part of her influence from her political speeches at international political forums. Particularly, the controversy surrounding her rhetoric (partly mentioned in the epilogue of this essay) was generated after her speech at the United Nations Climate Change Summit, where Thunberg fiercely denounced inactive politicians with "How dare you!" Therefore, the analysis that follows is based on six English-language speeches Thunberg has made in such global forums: World Economics Forum at Davos (WEForum), TEDx Stockholm (TED),

European Parliament (EP), British Parliament (BP), 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24), and United Nations Climate Change Summit (UN Summit). The speeches all took place in 2019 because, since the COVID-19 pandemic, Thunberg has moved her advocacy mainly to Twitter.

In the genre of political speeches, I argue that Thunberg engages her audience in the social action of recognizing climate change inaction among politicians and powerful people through two rhetorical strategies. She first adheres to the traditional epideictic aspect of political speeches to shape the audience's values as disapproval toward political inaction on climate change and as anxiety about climate change. Thunberg also queers the traditional epideictic genre by fearlessly displaying her autistic identity, which is deemed improper in traditional political speeches. Through utilizing the genre of epideictic political speeches as social action to shape the audience's understanding of the exigence of climate change, Thunberg queers the traditional assumption that autistic rhetors are arhetorical and queers the traditional rhetoric that only recognizes neurotypical rhetoric as acceptable. In these two ways, Thunberg potentially solicits collective climate action from her mediated audience online, which mostly consists of average citizens.

To start with, it is essential to understand the epideictic exigence of the political speeches genre. The epideictic genre is coined by Aristotle as "Either he succeeds . . . by concealing the core of the problem and . . . deceiving the

reader by arousing . . . the deceptive illusion of comprehension; or else he gives an expert account of the problem, but in such a fashion that the untrained reader is unable to follow" (qtd. in Fahnestock 276). According to Aristotle, epideictic speech emphasizes the delivery of the rhetor's values to their audience, thus engaging in the social action of reshaping the audience's understanding of the exigence in the situation. According to Reisigl, "the verbalization of political values" (244) mostly conforms to the recognized epideictic genre. Thunberg's speech, used at political forums to deliver her advocacy about climate change action, also conforms to the epideictic political speeches genre. Thunberg further uses the epideictic genre of political speeches to emphasize the exigence of immediate climate change action by partly omitting the reasoning process of climate change inaction, instilling into the audience's mindset that political inaction about climate change is prevalent. Such a tactic potentially rouses the guilt of her immediate audience, which is made up of politicians and other powerful people whose career depends on the support from others about their credibility, and sparks in her mediated audience online, which is made up of mostly average citizens, the detest and anger toward the current static situation of climate change action. In this way, Thunberg engages in the social action of making her audience understand the exigence of urgent climate change action, potentially making her immediate audience to reflect upon their rhetoric on climate change and soliciting her mediated audience to start

community-based action instead of relying on political leadership.

STAYING TRUE TO AUTISM

Despite adhering to the epideictic exigence of the political speeches genre, Thunberg also queers the genre by adding variations to her rhetoric to achieve the goal of shaping the audience's values. Traditional political rhetoric requires prosocial body language and identification with the audience, framing the rhetor with a high morality that realistic politics may not achieve (Yergeau 149-50). However, Thunberg challenges such a traditional rhetoric by pointing out the truth of climate change, distinguishing her stance from her audience, and fearlessly disclosing her autistic identity to the public. Despite the difficulty of adding variations to such an administered and institutional genre as political speeches, Thunberg, harnessing her autistic identity, successfully queers the rhetorical genre.

In these speeches, one way Greta Thunberg queers traditional rhetoric is by being open with the public about her autistic identity. As already mentioned, due to the social stigmatization of people on the autistic spectrum, appearing at public forums as an autistic rhetor itself carries a heavy burden. However, Thunberg transforms her autistic identity into a rhetorical strategy to define the exigence of climate change action as urgent, engaging the audience in an autistic mindset and instilling her anxiety about climate change inaction into the audience.

In her TED speech, for example, Thunberg describes her condition with details: "I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, OCD and

selective mutism. That basically means I only speak when I think it's necessary" ("The Disarming Case" 00:01:47-57). Shifting the subject from her own experience to the global crisis, Thunberg continues: "Now is one of those moments" ("The Disarming Case" 00:01:58-9). By using consecutive names of the different syndromes she is suffering from and a rapid change to the conclusive sentence "now is one of those moments," Thunberg instills the anxiety of wasting time into the audience's understanding of the climate change exigence. Instead of a weakening identity, autism, with Thunberg's rhetorical strategy, creates a lens for the audience to understand the climate change crisis: time is not to be wasted.

Aside from her oral identification as autistic, Thunberg also physically illustrates her autistic traits in her public speaking, showing her sincere worries about the climate change crisis, although these "unstable" traits are often deemed improper in political speeches. The impact of depression and anxiety is illustrated throughout Thunberg's public speeches. Thunberg constantly blinks, frowns, writhes her face, and crosses her fingers. She cannot maintain constant eye contact in every direction with the audience. For example, in her European Parliament speech, she begins with several mistakes and pauses. When she expands on the dire consequences of climate change brought by public ignorance, her fluency further deteriorates, and she starts sobbing (00:04:34). Also, Thunberg usually puts her arms alongside her body, which differs from popular rhetors who use diverse hand gestures to engage audiences while talking. When the audience laughs or applauds for her, Thunberg ignores their reaction and continues her speech

with focus; when the audience pays less attention to her speeches, Thunberg explicitly calls for their full attention. For example, in her British Parliament speech, Thunberg directly asks the audience when her speech is almost inundated by the sound of clicking cameras and rustling personnel: “Is the microphone really on?” (00:03:54-6). When the audience laughs at her straightforward manner, Thunberg disregards them and continues after the noise has died down. No matter the reaction from the audience, Thunberg only focuses on spreading her message. Although these bodily expressions have drawn attacks to her appearance (North), Thunberg doesn’t contain her autistic traits, which, in fact, grant her sincerity. In the current world, where polarized comments frequently circulate through global media and increase the public’s doubt about political institutions (Carothers and O’Donohue), sincere expressions are gaining traction to achieve greater ethos. These bodily expressions convince the audience of Thunberg’s serious worry about the climate change crisis and her determination to fight climate change.

Apart from showing autistic traits both verbally and nonverbally, Thunberg also explicitly engages the audience to “panic” with her about the crisis, soliciting direct fear and action. She queers the traditional diplomatic rhetoric by discarding the prosocial and appropriate standards that encourage a positive image of the global situation. Thunberg instead pushes for climate change action by inviting the audience to panic as she does, thus feeling compelled to change the status quo. Thunberg begins her European Parliament speech by saying, “My name is Greta Thunberg. I’m from Sweden. I am seventeen years old, and I want you to

panic” (00:00:01-05). In her World Economic Forum speech, Thunberg stresses the panicking theme throughout: “I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day” (00:02:25-31). Thunberg, repeating second-person requests in the patterned sentences of “I want you to . . . ,” engages the audience in the panicking mindset that climate change inaction should bring.

Moreover, using an autistic mindset, Thunberg can also point out the harsh truths of the climate change crisis, completely toppling the audience’s traditional perception of the climate change crisis. In many of her speeches, Thunberg constantly stresses the need to speak clearly about uncomfortable truths, which is what she has been doing by being autistic. Unlike neurotypical people who value social conventions and take language beyond its literal meaning, autistic people tend to perceive situations at their face value and express their opinions in a straightforward and literal way (Hamilton). In traditional diplomatic discourse, politicians tend to downplay the climate change crisis to comfort the public and reap short-term economic profits, worsening the crisis rather than solving it. Such socially valued soft rhetoric is, in fact, “inhuman, inflexible, and polarized” (Rottenberg qtd. in Yergeau 151). In contrast, Thunberg, bearing the risk of being called an “unempathetic, rigid, black-or-white thinker” (Rottenberg qtd. in Yergeau 151), strives to queer the traditional rhetoric by pointing out the harsh scientific facts and political inaction about climate change crisis that pushes the climate change crisis to a breaking point where action must be taken now or never.

Specifically, Thunberg tries to convince the audience of such cruel truths by completely

reversing the traditional rhetoric that deems the autistic as untrustworthy:

I think in many ways we autistic are the normal ones and the rest of the people are pretty strange, especially when it comes to the sustainability crisis where everyone keeps saying that climate change is an existential threat and the most important issue of all and yet they just carry on like before. (“The Disarming Case” 00:02:12-24)

Thunberg deconstructs the traditional understanding of a “normal” perception of the climate change crisis, claiming that queered rhetoric should be the one widely accepted in the case of crisis communication. She further engages her audience in the autistic mindset by explaining its way of functioning, which is viewing issues as “black-or-white”:

For those of us who are on the spectrum, almost everything is black-or-white. We aren’t very good at lying and we usually don’t enjoy participating in the social game that the rest of you seem so fond of . . . I don’t understand that, because if the emissions have to stop, then we must stop the emissions. To me, that is black-or-white. (“The Disarming Case” 00:02:08-52)

As a literal thinker, granted by autism, Thunberg repeatedly emphasizes the “black-or-whiteness” in her mindset. Thunberg doesn’t take a “neutral” stance, which treats climate change issues only as secondary and thus delaying action. According to South African human rights activist Desmond Tutu, “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” Also, when she speaks of this

sentence, Thunberg smiles, which is rare in her public appearance as she has developed anxiety from the climate change crisis (fig. 1). The smile strengthens Thunberg’s affirmation that an honest recognition of the climate change crisis is the correct rhetoric, while the denying rhetoric of the crisis adopted by current political discourses is despicable.



Fig. 1. Greta Thunberg’s smile (TEDxStockholm, “School Strike for the Future,” TEDTalk, screenshot, 28 Jan. 2019)

Overall, Greta Thunberg queers the genre of public speaking by creating variations of the genre that stay true to her autistic identity. Viewing and telling issues literally and exhibiting anxiety brought by climate change, she defines the exigence as timely climate change action and engages the audience in an autistic mindset to face the crisis.

“DRAWING THE LINE” WITH THE AUDIENCE

Thunberg’s identity is also crucial in another one of her rhetorical strategies in political speeches: distancing herself from her immediate audience. Although previous literature like that of Frey argues in her study on Thunberg’s rhetoric that she uses *parrhesia*, stating facts in public speeches despite potential attacks, to construct her ethos. However, Frey doesn’t mention that Thunberg’s use of *parrhesia* partly stems from her autistic identity, caring less about public opinion and focusing more on the denouncement against politicians that she aims to deliver. In this way, Thunberg instills guilt and a fear of losing support into her immediate audience and injects detest toward inactive, powerful people into her mediated audience.

For example, in her UN Summit speech, Thunberg fiercely addresses the politicians in the audience: “We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now, is where we draw the line” (00:04:37-41). In the same speech, Thunberg repeats the pattern of “how dare you” to condemn the political inaction made by powerful people in the audience. Throughout her public speeches, Thunberg queers the rhetorical genre conventions that encourage identification with the immediate audience. Thunberg doesn’t seek to favor her audience but denounces them while engaging the mediated audience online (mostly average people) to criticize political inaction.

One way Thunberg creates her distance with political leaders is with clearly distinguished pronouns: when addressing political leaders, she uses second-person or third-person

pronouns, while when describing average people, she uses first-person pronouns. With such shifting uses of pronouns, Thunberg alienates those who hold power and stands with the people, convincing them that political inaction is what has been aggravating the climate change crisis. In this way, Thunberg makes her immediate audience lose the most important thing they value: support. In her TED speech, Thunberg alienates politicians who don’t care enough about climate change by calling them “anyone” (00:03:43), a third-person pronoun that is vague and unimportant, stating that none of these people cares about or publicly acknowledges the scientific facts that admit climate change. Finally, Thunberg envisions her future self and the next generation putting charges against current political leaders for their inaction, eventually shifting to “you” as a pronoun that pinpoints politicians, inviting direct condemnation from the public to politicians (00:07:31-42). In her COP24 speech, Thunberg further points out the fatal fallacy in political rhetoric: “You say you love your children above all else, yet you steal their future in front of their eyes . . . You only talk about moving forward with the same bad ideas that got us into this mess, even when the only sensible thing to do is pull the emergency brake. You are not mature enough to tell it like is. Even that burden you leave to us children” (00:02:15-20). By using “you do” in anaphora, Thunberg harnesses a criticizing tone, pointing out politicians’ mistakes one by one truthfully.

Moreover, Thunberg also denounces the politicians by labeling them as “killers” that destroy the future of the entire earth, escalating

their moral crisis. As Kenneth Burke argues about the image of killing, “the depicting of a thing’s end may be a dramatic way of identifying its essence” (qtd. in Yergeau 75). Thunberg accurately incriminates the audience by blaming the destruction of innocent citizens and future generations on them. One motif throughout her speeches at TED and COP24 is Thunberg’s vision of her future self, symbolizing the entire future generation who are not able to change climate policies now but will suffer from the consequences of current inaction. She poses the question of who to blame when future generations are forced to die of climate change. In this way, Thunberg morally indicts politicians, accusing them of crimes that no rhetoric can defend. For example, in her COP24 speech, Thunberg says that “our entire civilization is being sacrificed for the opportunity of a very small number of people to continue making a lot of money” (00:01:28-31), signaling that political inaction threatens the entire human civilization in a cruel and violent way. Therefore, Thunberg offers the audience a non-choice: either start action or be incriminated as killers. Thunberg not only isolates herself from the audience but also invites her online audience to criticize the politicians, decreasing the support that the elites in the audience receive to continue their business.

Thunberg describes the audience as vicious stealers and killers of basic human rights. In this way, Thunberg conceptualizes and formulates the political inaction through a vivid image of killing, which deserves no understanding or empathy from the general society, shaping the audience’s value that political

inaction is utterly unforgivable. Thunberg offers the audience a non-choice: either start action or be incriminated as killers and stealers. She materializes such non-choice in her EP2019 speech: “It’s okay if you refuse to listen to me . . . but you cannot ignore the scientists . . . or the millions of children school striking for the right to a future (00:11:49-00:12:08).” The audience has only one choice: admit and act upon climate change, or they will become unforgivable murderers. Thunberg not only isolates herself from the audience, not seeking identification or support from the powerful agents in the audience at all but also invites her online audience to criticize the politicians as well, decreasing the support that the political and rich people in the audience can receive to continue their business.

Apart from assigning the killing image to her immediate audience of politicians, Thunberg also positions a killing image as the circuitous, compromising solution to climate change provided by existing powerful people. To be more specific, in her British Parliament speech, Thunberg stresses that “One common misconception about emissions is that we have to lower the emission. But this is far from enough. We have to stop the emissions” (00:06:13-23). She kills the intermediary, dovish, and vague solution presented by current world leaders of “lower[ing] the emission” despite its potentiality to partly ameliorate the climate change crisis. To achieve this effect, she uses the concise conclusive sentence “but this is far from enough,” complemented with the adverb “far” to emphasize the unreasonable

and dangerous political status of the climate change crisis.

Thunberg thereby distances herself not only from her immediate audience but also from historical situations where climate change was discussed by powerful people, drawing a stark contrast between what politicians have done about climate change historically and what Thunberg advocates for doing currently, alienating the audience's emotions from historical inaction about climate change. Although it is significant in traditional rhetoric to refer to historical situations to make their views more acceptable, building their ethos (Pehar), Thunberg queers such rhetoric by alternatively negating the significance of past rhetoric. In her World Economics Forum speech, Thunberg begins by saying, "in places like Davos, people like to tell success stories. But ...on climate change, we have to admit that we have failed" (00:00:01-5). Thunberg distances herself from historically accepted rhetoric, contrasting the audience's expectation for success stories with actual failures. In her TED speech, Thunberg again contrasts her stance with that of historical rhetors on climate change, further queering political speeches: "Now we're almost at the end of my talk and this is where people usually start talking about hope, solar panels, wind power, circular economy, and so on. But I'm not going to do that" (00:09:30-50).

Thunberg encourages the audience to start action now while exploring possible solutions and possibly changing the historical situation entirely. Also, in her COP24 speech, Thunberg advocates for changing the system created by accumulated past experience: "If solutions

within the system are so impossible to find, maybe we should change the system itself" (00:02:45-50). This is a total rejection of historical inaction. Through her queering rhetoric, Thunberg defies the past that creates fake promises while advocating for creations that are immediate and exploratory.

For one exception, in her BP speech, Thunberg refers to historical situations where humans have needed to face other crises. What's different is that she references crises stemming not from humans' existence but humans' desire and curiosity about their future living. Therefore, her reference is, in fact, to advocate for exploration and immediate action in situations of emergency:

How do you solve the greatest crisis humanities have ever faced? How do you solve a war? How do you solve going to the moon for the first time? How do you solve inventing new innovations? Climate crisis is both the easiest and the hardest issue we have ever faced. . . . No one knows for sure. But we have to stop greenhouse gas emissions (00:08:40-00:09:30).

Using a series of rhetorical questions to refer to past situations where humans had to face challenges they had never met, Thunberg states that the top priority in solving the climate crisis is to reckon with its urgency and explore solutions through action instead of waiting. In this way, Thunberg queers history-oriented rhetoric, using her rhetoric to facilitate action.

In all, instead of following the standardized genre of political speeches in creating

identification with the audience, Thunberg queers the genre by displaying her autistic identity, distancing herself from politicians, denouncing political inaction by a killer image, engaging the audience in an autistic mindset, and cutting off reliance on history. Moreover, since her speeches will be spread online, Thunberg's denunciation against her live audience also invites her mediated audience's reflection upon political inaction and unite in acting as average citizens.

UNITY AND ACTION

Apart from instilling into the values of her mediated audience online with denunciation against political leaders on climate change, Thunberg also steers the rhetoric toward building unity at the end of her speeches, encouraging average citizens to unite to tackle climate change together. Her queering of the epideictic political speeches genre here is displayed through her focus on soliciting support from her mediated audience instead of her immediate audience. In order to do this, Thunberg uses effable rhetorical strategies that reduce the distance she has from her mediated audience. In this way, Thunberg breaks the neurotypical stereotype that autistic rhetors are asocial and would fail to solicit united action.

Thunberg uses first-person pronouns to address the audience (primarily the mediated audience), making people feel that everyone is on the same boat, infusing power and faith into collective action. For example, at the end of her TED2019 speech, Thunberg advocates, "imagine what we could all do together if we wanted to" (09:21-24).

Thunberg's sense of community focuses specifically on children, neurodivergent people, and average citizens who don't hold enormous power. In COP24, Thunberg particularly emphasizes the power of regular individuals. "I've learned you are never too small to make a difference" (0:18-20) . . . the real power belongs to the people" (03:15-16). Such a uniting rhetoric also leads to Thunberg's more intimate and community-building rhetoric in her advocacy blogging genre.

To conclude, Thunberg's autistic identity, as well as her child citizen identity discussed by Bach and Frey, is also essential for her to create an exigence of immediate climate change. She harnesses her autistic identity to queer the traditional rhetoric by distinguishing herself from the audience fearlessly. Also, Thunberg doesn't leave the exigence unanswered. At the end of her speeches, Thunberg unites her audience, primarily the mediated audience, to denounce political inaction and act upon climate change immediately. Although her uniting rhetoric is not obvious in her public speeches, more detailed solutions to her exigence lie within her advocacy blogging genre on Twitter.

DISCUSSION

While Greta Thunberg's unique rhetoric has prompted discussion among scholars, the role of her autism in her choices of rhetorical strategies has scarcely been mentioned. This essay, based on the theoretical framework of queering traditional rhetoric through genres as social action, has analyzed and found important connections between Thunberg's autistic identity and her rhetoric:

1. Thunberg both conforms to and queers the traditional rhetorical conventions of the epideictic political speeches genre. Specifically, she conforms to the epideictic style of the political speeches genre, and she queers the genre by displaying her autistic identity against traditional assumptions, enhancing the epideictic effect of the genre.
2. Thunberg uses epideictic political speeches as the social action of shaping the audience's understanding of the exigence of the urgent climate change. She achieves this by partly omitting scientific and political details about climate change and effusively using pathos.
3. Thunberg queers the traditional rhetoric through the epideictic political speeches genre by staying true to autism and distancing herself from the audience. Granted by the ability of autistic people to think in a literal way, Thunberg speaks the truth of political inaction about climate change. Thunberg also illustrates her autistic traits fearlessly, engaging the audience in an autistic mindset, feeling anxious and thus taking useful action against climate change. Moreover, Thunberg labels her audience as killers of future civilizations and cuts off her connections with historical rhetoric. These choices draw a significant contrast with the traditional political conventions, which usually strive to create identification with the audience.
4. Thunberg doesn't leave her exigence promoted in her speeches unanswered.

At the end of her speeches, Thunberg appeals to her mediated audience, mostly consisting of average citizens instead of powerful but inactive politicians, for unity in climate change action. She also further answers the exigence with solutions posted in her advocacy microblogs genre on Twitter.

The queering of rhetoric deserves more attention in the field of rhetorical studies because it is an infinite exploration of rhetoric, especially for neurodivergent people, who are largely ignored in today's communication. In terms of research, this project has implications for a range of topics, including Childhood Studies, Gender Studies, and Neurodiversity Studies. It also has implications for studying public rhetoric by enriching our notions of "insider" and "outsider" discourse and effective forms of address, especially in the realm of education, where children start their fundamental communication with the world.

Specifically, in the realm of education, which almost everyone goes through at some time in their lives, disabilities rhetoric is severely excluded. According to disability studies scholar David Bolt, in the contemporary academy, there is a "critical avoidance [and a] lack of engagement" with disability that evidences a "manifestly academic form of Othering" (qtd. in Dolmage 20). Although there are already accommodation opportunities provided for neurodivergent students, these are mostly "defeat devices", which are procedures that are designed to cover the lack of accommodation superficially but, in fact, only make it more difficult for students to ask for actual accommodation (Dolmage 74). What's more, a lot of university disabilities offices are still seriously

underfunded and thus, the accommodation service they can provide charges exorbitant fees, which is impossible for most students to afford (170). Disability has always been considered “as a problem in need of a solution” (Titchkosky qtd. in Dolmage 4), just as autistic rhetoric is always deemed ineffective, and thus autistic stories have been narrated by neurotypical people.

Therefore, Thunberg’s queering rhetoric can become an inspiring example for autistic people and for educators to consider in the refining the education system. For example, instead of grading students on a strict system in which they have to come up with thoughtful and well-accepted responses in class, teachers can diversify the forms of participation and encourage autistic students to choose and explore their own rhetorics. Also, queering autistic rhetoric can be involved in the efforts to improve the adaptability of the education system, such as the establishment of Universal Design (UD), which is “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Mace qtd. in Dolmage 115). This educational design, sounding attractive, fails to “prioritize the value of different abilities, needs, and goals in users” (129). It is a positive assumption by designers about what kind of facilities everyone enjoys, ignoring the individual possibilities of

different rhetorics. Understanding the infinitely explorative autistic rhetoric can help designers truly incorporate neurodivergent students’ needs in the education system, prioritizing the specific ideals they look forward to in the classroom.

Some questions for future researchers to consider when designing educational methods for students, specifically for neurodivergent students, are listed as follows: How do neurodivergent students want to express their ideas and participate in the classroom? How do we construct safe and encouraging conversations with neurodivergent students to understand their needs? How do we teach genres and rhetorics as more flexible and explorative concepts in the classroom? These are the research directions that Thunberg’s rhetoric can inspire.

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APPENDIX: SPEECHES ANALYZED

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