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Elemental Climate Disaster Texts and Queer Ecological Temporality

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Elemental Climate Disaster Texts and Queer Ecological Temporality

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Chapter One: Introduction: Orienting to Queer Climate Disasters	1
Review of Relevant Literature	3
Ecocriticism as Transformation	3
Hurricanes as Climate Disasters	7
Ecocriticism and Climate Fiction (Cli-fi)	9
Elemental/Queer Autoethnographies	11
Literature Summary	13
Theoretical Framework	13
Queer Ecological Bodies	13
Queer Ecological Time	17
Methodologies	19
Chapter Overview	20
Chapter Two: Queer Human-Nature Relationships in Climate Disaster Film <i>Waterworld</i>	23
Ecocritical Textual Analysis	27
Synopsis	32
Analyzing Human-Nature Relationships	33
Discussion	39
Chapter Three: We're Living in Queer Times: Autoethnography of Queer Ecological Temporality	42
Critical Evocative Autoethnography	43
Coming to the Method	43
Waiting to Come Out	47
Waiting for Irma	51
Coming Back to Coming Out	55
Waiting to Understand	59
Invoking Queer Ecological Temporality	60
Conclusion: Queerness and Climate Disasters	62
Queering Body, Space, and Time	62
Theoretical and Methodological Contributions	64
Ethical Implications	66
Limitations	68
Recommendations for Further Research	69
Remembering Climate Futures	71
References	73

Abstract



This thesis approaches climate disaster texts as an opportunity to challenge constructions of the body, space, and time. Developed from embodied experiential knowledge about hurricanes, my work will explore how climate disasters can teach us to reimagine human-nature relationships. In my two analysis chapters, I use critical textual analysis and autoethnography to challenge particular representations of the human-nature relationship as a binary between nature and culture. By intervening in the nature-culture binary, I theorize queer ecological temporality as an opportunity to reveal and challenge constructions of nature and time. Working at the intersections of queer and ecocritical theory, this thesis contributes to queer, environmental, and critical cultural communication research. Ultimately, I argue a queer sense of bodies, space, and time transform my understanding of hurricanes by blurring the nature-culture binary and emphasizing a queer ecological temporality of climate disaster.

Introduction: Orienting to Queer Climate Disasters

I like to think I understand hurricanes. Living in Southwest Florida all my life, the late summer hurricane season often registers as little more than another marker of the passage of time. Just like going back to school, the annual reminder that I may have to fight for my life in an onslaught of wind and water creates a rhythm of familiarity, if not comfort. Perhaps this is why, along with about 60,000 other Facebook users, I attended an event to “point their fans at Hurricane Irma to blow it away” (Stanaland, 2017, n.p.). When I am lucky and, indeed, privileged enough to have hurricanes blow over my house leaving little more than inconvenience in their wake, a cyclical kind of response seems entirely adequate. As hurricane season ended for the year, I gradually used up my water stores and checked the weather reports less often. That it should feel normal, this cycle of threat, waiting, and scrambled response, is remarkable to me still. I cannot say why this is a normal reaction to hurricanes pounding our shores year after year. It is a rhythm ingrained in me, carried in my tissues as residual trauma from memories of hurricanes past.

Facing the adaptive challenge of climate change and hurricanes, I seek to identify a new way of knowing the storm. Throughout my project, I explore what messages are being communicated about human-nature relationships as a nature-culture binary. Seeking to transform human-nature relationships, I ask, *how could a queer approach to climate disaster representation and experience transform how I understand the hurricane in terms of body, space, and time?* I argue queering climate disaster representations and experiences blurs the nature-culture binary and reimagines ecological temporality.

My project will contribute to communication as a discipline by advancing the field's ecocritical and autoethnographic approaches in three main ways. First, I blend environmental and critical cultural studies using queer theory. While this project deals directly with environmental communication themes like nature and climate disaster, a queer theoretical framework and critique of discursive power also situate this project in critical cultural studies. The work speaks to several of McDonald's (2017) criteria for critical research: troubling normative assumptions, proposing transformation, and committing to transparency and reflexivity. One goal of this project is to find ways for queerness to move beyond gender or sexual minorities, herein challenging assumptions of the applications of queer theory. Further, my analysis of hurricanes through queer theory advances transformative constructions of the body, nature-as-space, and time. Using climate disaster to theorize queer ecological temporality, I develop scholarship in the intersections of queer theory and ecocritical studies.

While I recognize it is important for queer theory to remain grounded in experiences of queer identity, I seek to create space for it in a broader critical conversation about transforming systems of power. To maintain a balance between embodied and applied invocations of queer theory, my project's second contribution is using both textual analysis and autoethnography interpretive methods. Within cultural studies, I draw from interpretive interactionism to consider how bodies and texts together nuance my understanding of lived experience (Denzin, 2011 & Durham, 2014). Even as I recommend queer ontologies and ecologies in the face of climate disaster, I also turn inward to consider how my embodied sense of place and time realigns when submerged. Durham's (2014) blended project in *Home with Hip Hop Feminism* engages with popular culture texts, autoethnographies, and interviews. Similarly, I use textual analysis and autoethnography to consider both multiple perspectives of interpretive research.

Finally, I also offer a methodological contribution to autoethnography practice—masking identity through environmental narration. When remembering particular moments of personal significance I want to include in my story, I am also mindful about other identities I may be implicating. Some relationships, like close family, are impossible to truly mask. In response to this concern, I animate features of my story’s environment, like surrounding objects and elemental forces. This emphasizes the interactivity of material nonhuman objects and evokes the necessary feeling without identifying a specific human cause. This methodological practice could help autoethnographers dealing with intimate or personal details of their lives protect others’ privacy.

Being transparent about my own investment in the topic, I will advocate for queerness in communication research by positioning it beyond a theory which only applies to queer people. Accordingly, I view this project as informed by and dedicated to queer communities. My deep personal investment in advocating for queerness in all forms drives this work, which applies queer theories to research on the environment to critique normative assumptions about the body, space, and time.

Review of Relevant Literature

Working at the intersections of environmental communication and queer scholarship, my work joins ongoing conversations about ecocritical transformation, climate disasters, climate-fiction, and elemental or queer autoethnographies.

Ecocriticism as transformation. Before addressing the underlying values of recent ecocritical research, I first situate ecocriticism as a subarea of environmental communication. Pezzullo and Cox (2018) identified environmental communication as “a discipline of crisis and care” (p. xv). It is not only concerned with responding to the threat of climate change and climate

disaster but it is also committed to advocating for the environment. Topically, environmental communication can be considered the forms and modes of expressing relationships with ecological systems and species. From a basic understanding of environmental communication, it becomes clear that the field is concerned with exploring and improving agents' situations in the broader world.

Defining ecocriticism elucidates its disciplinary engagements. Bulfin (2017) described ecocriticism as a method that centers the role of the nonhuman physical world in cultural studies work. Bulfin analyzed popular culture as an active force in constructing society's views and values about the environment and climate change. Ecocriticism, then, is a method with a myriad of potential inspirations. Building on this understanding, I approach ecocriticism as a transdisciplinary endeavor. Together, these varied approaches contribute multiple perspectives on representations and relationships with the environment.

As a transdisciplinary method, ecocriticism carries distinct underlying values like challenging the nature-culture binary. According to Alaimo (2016), the nature-culture binary is the dominant Western approach to human-nature relationships. Specifically, Alaimo approached the domestic home as a cultural figure of the nature-culture binary, as the home's cleanliness and structural integrity demarcate a strict barrier to the outside world of nature. Scholars theorize nature-culture binary originated in industrial capitalism (Doyle, 2016) or the Enlightenment era (Swanson et al., 2017).

Ecocriticism also works to deconstruct and transcend the nature-culture binary, seeking alternative forms of human-nature relationships. Thinking beyond the nature-culture binary, like Barad's (2017) attention to "natural-cultural phenomena," requires an imaginative perspective on the order of life with/in nature (G111). For example, Sturgeon's (2010) work with ecological

families argued for a critical queering of patriarchal heterosexual family structures because they perpetuate environmental degradation. From critiquing the nature-culture binary's long history of economic systems of inequality to advancing queer ecological relationships, ecocriticism assumes the existence of a nature-culture binary and values its transformation.

In recent ecocritical projects, I am struck by the various invocations and evocations of queer theory. Deeply connected to justice for marginalized bodies, queer theory working within ecocriticism can contribute to its critique of organized power and transformative potential. Several of the texts in this review engaged with queer theory explicitly. In others, similar themes and theoretical values emerged without naming the queerness directly. First, I analyze the role of queer theory where it was claimed by the authors.

The foundational volume linking the two areas is *Queer Ecologies*, edited by Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson (2010). They traced genealogies of the emerging research area to explore the contributions of queer identity and theory to ecological study. According to the editors, the three main areas of queer ecological research are how sexuality has been historically naturalized, how landscapes are shaped by sexual politics, and queering heterosexist and dualistic ideas of the natural (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010, p. 6). The works in the volume transform a binary or oppositional view toward nature through a queer embodied perspective, using queer theory as a deconstructive and reconstructive tool. As a project of challenging the nature-culture binary, I see ecocriticism as indebted to queer embodiments and understandings of binary disruption.

Alaimo (2016) pursued the second and third goals of queer ecology by attending to queer animals and queer geographies. In *Exposed*, Alaimo explored queer animals as figures for queer environmentalisms. She also considered queer landscapes, where nature is pleasurable,

surprising, and dynamic. Together, these two works on queer bodies and space suggest the far-reaching implications of ecologies beyond binaries. Here, the applications of queerness are not limited to social reform, but also include ontological or epistemological transformation.

The references to queerness in these ecocritical projects go beyond applications of queer identities' experiences. In *Arts for Living on a Damaged Planet*, Freccero (2017) performed a "queer figural historiography" of human-wolf relationships (p. M92). The chapter does not directly analyze experiences of queer identity. Rather, it applies queer theory as a method of "twisted paths, denatur[alized] temporal chronologies and ideologies" (Freccero, 2017, p. M92). Working in queer theory beyond a direct tie to queer experience is a complicated path. On the one hand, I find it imperative that queer theory has more than a niche application. At the same time, I fear queer theory could become too abstracted from the lives which created it. In this case, I find Freccero's work striking an important balance. Using a foundational queer temporality theory keeps queerness close to its genealogy without putting the burden of labor directly on queer bodies. This example of applied and explicit engagement with queer theory demonstrates the workings of queerness in ecocriticism. Queer theory presents an essential but not essentializing opportunity for environmental communication.

Ecocriticism pursues transformation in conversation with the principles of queer ecology. Doyle's book *Mediating Climate Change* (2016) studied representations and discourses of climate change. Throughout, Doyle attended to the scientific deployments of nature, vision, and time which impact our understanding of climate change. While the book does not name queer theory or ecocriticism directly, it certainly contributes to queer ecology's goal of deconstructing constructions of nature. Doyle considered a critical analysis of underlying systems of power necessary to generate ethical responses to climate change and the injustices it exacerbates. As I

see it, this project works in alliance with queer and ecocritical theory. Queer values of transformation may be more pervasive in environmental communication than it may first appear.

As a second example of the underlying queerness of ecocriticism, Hejnol's (2017) chapter of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* employed examples of species diverting from evolutionary trends to think beyond a hierarchy of life. Citing tunicates and comb jellyfish as notoriously difficult to classify organisms that have moved backward on the evolutionary chain, Hejnol challenged organization and classification systems which perpetuate hierarchies of inequality. Hejnol's work also aligns with projects in *Queer Ecologies*, like Alaimo's (2010) chapter viewing queer animals as active agents in their own right. These works demand a new way of knowing and understanding the diversity of the world and its sexualities. With many overlaps between projects with explicit and inferred relationships to queer theory, I begin to wonder what the choice to name it implies.

Hurricanes as climate disasters. Understanding hurricanes is more complex in the climate change era. In a 2015 study, Kang and Elsner demonstrated the world's oceans are warming, making tropical cyclones more intense, albeit less frequent. Viewing hurricanes as natural disasters at all is contested, with scholars advocating for new framing to accurately represent the influence of human-driven climate change. Yoosun Park and Miller (2006) contested framing hurricanes as natural disasters at all, given the rich interplay between meteorological events and human contextual landscapes. Instead, they advocated for a new framing of hurricanes more representative of their role in broader social ecologies because “[natural disasters] are not separable from the consequences of human action,” (Park & Miller, 2006, p. 10). When extreme weather events like hurricanes are driven by the effects of human-caused climate change, calling them *natural* disasters obscures human responsibility.

Accordingly, my first task in this project is a discursive one. I orient toward hurricanes as climate disasters, which ominously refers dually to immediate threats of the destructive storms and the thematic precarity of the climate change era. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information named multiple tropical cyclones, including Hurricane Irma, “weather and climate disasters” (2019, n.p.). This naming invites an intriguing ambiguity when compared to other evocations of climate disaster, like in a letter written by academics, artists, and activists concerned with the climate and ecological breakdowns associated with climate change (Thunberg et al., 2019). In the letter, the detrimental impact on global ecologies is itself the disaster; the authors’ concern is not limited to the implications for human routines and infrastructures.

This messy discursive ambiguity between hurricanes as storms and manifestations of a broader climate issue was also recognized by the 2018 National Climate Assessment (Jay et al., 2018). Regarding the role of extreme weather events, the team explained: “Individual extreme weather and climate-related events—even those that have not been clearly attributed to climate change by scientific analyses—reveal risks to society and vulnerabilities that mirror those we expect in a warmer world.” (Jay et al., 2018, p. 66). That is to say, even where climate change cannot be directly proven to be responsible for a strong, devastating, unusual disaster, it should be seen as one representation of the types of precarity society will experience as climate change worsens. For my project, I see this ambiguous interplay essential, as it works to reach beyond orientations toward hurricanes as individual episodes to be weathered. To situate my discussion of hurricanes in both their localized and more thematic contexts, I approach the storms as climate disasters.

The link between climate change and natural disasters implicates cultural and political ecologies. Skilton (2018) reviewed the history of the female-naming system of hurricanes and argued the use of gendered names, even after the inclusion of masculine names, perpetuates gender stereotypes. Citing Jung et al.'s provocative 2014 study demonstrating female-named hurricanes are deadlier, she argued hurricanes' genders matter. Where hurricane naming practices gender hurricane narratives, they evoke histories of gendered oppression. Skilton succinctly described the revelations ripe in hurricane study, writing: "To study a hurricane is to examine a microcosm of society at its moment of greatest stress and dismay, to see cultural trends and assumptions laid bare, like the exposed foundations of a home swept away by gale-force winds" (2018, p. 135). Approaching hurricanes as visceral experiences of wind and water exposing our society's foundations, the elements drive her critical work.

By using a hurricane to critique social and cultural power, Tuana's (2007) approach to Hurricane Katrina suggests the deep relevance of disaster studies for ecocritical work. Implicating systemic problems in New Orleans disaster response, Tuana used Hurricane Katrina as a case study to reconceptualize human-nature relationships. Throughout, Tuana critiqued cultural forces at play, like ableism, racism, and classism. These two examples of critical cultural scholarship of hurricanes suggest the larger cultural meanings at work in responding to the storms.

Ecocriticism and climate fiction (cli-fi). In my review of ecocritical cli-fi scholarship, I find scholars concerned with the genre and two famous examples—*The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015). Looking at the cli-fi genre as a whole, Svoboda (2015) identified seven subthemes: flooding/sea-level rise, extreme weather events, ice age, melting arctic, famine/drought, preclima(c)tic stress disorder, and climate

antagonists. Of these groups, extreme weather event cli-fi films are the most common. In particular, Svoboda was concerned with popular blockbuster films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004) which promise last-minute salvation from climate disaster. Instead, the genre needs films representing adaptive strategies in the face of overwhelming and catastrophic climates.

Similarly, Bulfin (2017) analyzed popular catastrophe narratives and their impact on climate change communication. Noting responses to *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), Bulfin argued that the film helped people make contrasts between the swift apocalyptic climate disaster in the film and the gradual creep of climate disaster in our world. Bulfin noted cli-fi's significance in helping imagine the large-scale effects of climate disaster yet-to-happen. As such, it warrants further investigation into the messages of cli-fi films.

The popular film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015), hereafter *Mad Max*, has been analyzed several times (Du Plooy, 2019; Pesses, 2019; Richardson, 2018; & Yates, 2017). The last two of this list are most applicable here. Richardson (2018) connected his analysis of *Mad Max* to theories of futurity and climate trauma. After summarizing the main points of conflict in the film, he connected the film's narrative to a critique of capitalist struggle over resource control. Richardson approached the film as transformational, offering new forms of existence in a world demanding adaptation. Bringing the text back into its real-world context, Richardson concluded that viewing cli-fi films in the present manifests a fear for the future, demonstrating the impact of pop culture representations of climate disaster.

Yates (2017) approached *Mad Max* (Miller, 2015) as an ecocritical text doing ecofeminist work. For Yates, *Mad Max* is an ecocritical text because it disrupts a traditional ecological narrative of the Garden of Eden, treats nature as agential, and represents a transformational

ontology. Yates first reviewed the ecofeminist theories of linked oppression of nature and women and then compared *Mad Max* to earlier films in the franchise to situate its departure from its own inherited tropes. As a takeaway, Yates argued the film's main lesson for modern audiences is suspicion of efforts to return to Eden, or environmental purity. These analyses of cli-fi suggest the continued relevance of climate change communication via popular films.

Elemental/queer autoethnographies. My autoethnography of formative queer and hurricane experiences joins an ongoing practice of using personal narrative to explore these personal, embodied, life-changing moments. First, my work joins literature of autoethnographic understandings of natural disaster. Johnson (2018) narrated her experience of Hurricane Harvey by simultaneously recognizing the power of destruction and creation that wild natural elements possess. Through a deeply evocative narrative, Johnson argued that hurricanes expose the precarity of our social reality. This hurricane narrative approaches the disaster as a site of pain and imagination, a delicate balance that takes the storms seriously. While this is the piece most directly tied to my work here, there are several other works taking personal narrative approaches to disaster studies.

Many autoethnographies of natural disaster focus on the period of recovery and survival after the storm has passed. Browne (2008), Chan (2008), and Edmunds (2014) wrote about life after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Fishell (2013) discussed the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. While there is scholarship focusing on being in 'the eye of the storm' (Amankwaa, 2017), the post-disaster period appears most prominently. My autoethnography focuses on the period of anticipation before the hurricane hits, adding to an array of temporally diverse embodied knowledge of hurricanes.

Communication scholarship also produces autoethnographies of queer experience. In particular, I sought out others narrating their experiences of coming out as LGBTQ. From my review, these works are theory-driven and methodologically rigorous. Adams (2010) wrote autoethnographies of coming out as a gay man in academia and the politically fraught identity work it entails. Adams (2014) also wrote autoethnography focusing on the temporal phase after coming out. Using relational dialectics theory, Adams (2014) found a queer melancholy in his narrative, rife with longing for the past while grieving the present. Adams' autoethnographies establish ambiguity and complex temporality as aspects of queer experience.

I find two other autoethnographies contributing to the literature of coming out narratives. First, LeMaster (2014) used multivocal autoethnography to explore family relationships after coming out as queer. LeMaster understands gender identity as relational and fluid, recognizing the complex temporal and physical contexts enacting gender performances. Also taking an intersectional approach to queer identity, Eguchi (2015) critically explored their personal queer race awareness in social settings like gay bars and clubs. By evocatively relating moments of tension in various racialized spaces, Eguchi called for increased attention to material and discursive constructs that shape queer intercultural experiences. Together, these two queer autoethnographies center intersecting identities and their points of privilege and precarity.

I join this queer autoethnographic conversation by attending to my own positionality as both a marginalized queer body and a privileged white, middle-class scholar. My narratives of waiting to come out and anticipating hurricanes combine two recent areas of autoethnographic study. By highlighting the temporal dimensions of my lived experiences, I contribute to scholarship centering the embodied experiences of precarity in natural disasters and identity disclosure.

Literature Summary. After reviewing the values, theoretical contributions, and applications of ecocriticism, the literature reviewed here suggests the importance of climate stories in the pursuit of environmental justice and lasting transformation to face the challenges of the Anthropocene. From cli-fi films to embodied personal narratives, providing tangible narratives of the often-inscrutable effects of climate change matter. Throughout, this ecocritical research also used environmental justice issues to critique systems of queerphobia, colonialism, and racism. I see the boundary-blurring work of ecocriticism, such as transcending binary categorizations and rigid disciplinary lines, as queer-inspired. By reviewing recent ecocritical projects, I better understand ecocriticism's ethical orientation toward transformative and inclusive justice. Informed by these authors, I carry the metatheoretical assumption of nature as agential and more complex than Western dualisms allow. Studying hurricanes through ecocriticism, I approach them as manifestations of climate disasters. Working at the intersections of ecocritical and queer theory, I am reimagining and transforming human-hurricane relationships.

Theoretical Framework

In my two analysis chapters, I use queer theories of body, nature-as-space, and time to critique representations and experiences of the human-nature relationship as a binary between nature and culture. Queer ecological bodies ontologically challenge the nature-culture binary and queer ecological temporality builds on queer ecology to shift epistemologies privileging human temporality.

Queer ecological bodies. My work with climate disaster texts is situated in theories of queer ecological bodies. Before I explicate these specific theories and their uses for this work, I define how I approach the term *queer*. While housed, in the nominal sense, in issues of gender

and sexuality, queer can be extended to include other disruptive forces. I favor Halberstam's (2005) definition of queer: "nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (p. 6). This definition recognizes the sexual identity roots of queerness while allowing for a diverse application of different embodied experiences in solidarity. I identify queer as nonnormative embodied experiences which contribute to a different logic of space and time.

Taking an ecocritical approach to environmental communication's work of studying human-nature relationships, I seek theoretical transformation. As ecocriticism, my project is operating on the assumption that nature is agential. Recognizing the agency of nature, the space of what we generally consider to be 'out there,' is a queer notion in itself, as it upsets the Western dualistic approach to human-nature relationships. Pursuing alternative forms of human-nature relationships will require theories which blur the nature-culture binary. With a disregard for strict binary categorizations, I see a natural overlap with goals of queer theory. Accordingly, the theories I engage work in the spirit of a queer ecological body, forms of being which recognize porosity and impurity of bodies to transcend a nature-culture binary.

To start, invoking these new forms of being fundamentally requires an ontological shift. An interactionist ontology is one answer to the problem of the nature-culture binary. Tuana (2001) approached ontological interactionism as "emergent, issuing from complex interactions between our embodiment and the world" (p. 238-9). In other words, neither end of the nature-culture binary can be taken for granted. Rather, the existence of one shapes the other, and they continue reshaping each other as they go. Discussing the body through these theories cannot be detached from space. Human and nature, insofar as they appear here, are less discrete concepts

than labels of convenience. Underneath appearances, they are entangled, caught up in each other and co-creating our existence.

Tuana's (2007) work on Hurricane Katrina and power in New Orleans examined the resounding implications of longstanding systems of racism and poverty through the interactionist ontology of viscous porosity. Identifying viscous porosity as the interactivity between material aspects of social phenomena and the agency of the natural world, Tuana problematized concepts of nature as detached and passive. At the same time, viscous porosity challenges ideas of the body as purely social or cultural, detached from environmental concerns. On the contrary, the very name implies the permeability of boundaries between so-called distinct entities. Stressing instead the inherent fluidity and co-creation of being, viscous porosity "eschews the type of unity and continuity celebrated in traditional Western metaphysics" (Tuana, 2007, p. 188). At its core, viscous porosity is an ontological project in reimagining human-nature relationships.

In *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Alaimo (2010) drew from viscous porosity to extend interactionist ontologies with a theory of transcorporeality. Alaimo posited transcorporeality as the situation of the human within the material, describing it as a "turn from the disembodied values and practices of bounded individuals" (2010, p. 22). With an ethics of responsibility, transcorporeal beings are bound to their social and physical environments. One main contribution of her work with transcorporeality is its emphasis on toxic bodies and agencies, which are themselves caught up in systems of power. Here again, material or 'natural' agents are not separate from the systems of health and justice which impact 'human' society.

An (eco)critical approach to disaster provides opportunities to critique orderings of power which create hierarchies of inequalities between agents of different racialized identities,

economic situations, and even species. Where human bodies are viscously porous, taking in environmental influences, so too are they vulnerable to the material impacts of social injustice. Here, the elements are not limited to wind and water out in the world somewhere, but the atoms also pressing into bodies facing marginalization through less readily palpable social means. Viscerally connected to experiences of social injustice, this family of theory is deeply invested in critique of real-world power dynamics which perpetuate these inequalities. It reevaluates our position in relation to each other and our place in social, cultural, or political systems that create these relationships.

Reckoning with toxic bodies and systems, Shotwell (2016) argued to reject purism and purity politics. Purity politics are founded on “defensive individualism, the sense in which the self is imagined as a fortress, separable from the world and requiring defense against the world” (Shotwell, 2016, p. 11). Tracing the history of purity politics through racism, eugenics, ecological degradation, and violent exclusion, she critiqued this manifestation of the nature-culture binary for its social and climate injustices. In its place, Shotwell theorized being against purity by centering the ways in which we are all, already, impure, be it biologically, ecologically, or politically. Recognizing the biological strangeness of human bodies disrupts the purity of the nature-culture binary by revealing its impossibility.

In my work, I approach queer ecological bodies as porous, transcorporeal, and impure. Bodies represented on screen or in my memory cannot be easily separated from their material and social surroundings. Rather, they are ontologically intertwined to the core. Under such theory, my understanding of hurricanes must be complex enough to account for layers of shared responsibility and intra-acting in polluted, compromised worlds. Throughout, my work with queer human and elemental bodies is also informed by understandings of time.

Queer ecological time. My theoretical engagement in this project builds on two areas of research: queer temporality and ecological temporality. A project by, for, and about queer identity, I ground my theorizing in my own queer experience while also applying queer epistemologies to environmental studies. Before I preview how I navigate queer ecological temporality, I first review current understandings of queer temporality and ecological temporality.

Queer temporality is a ripe theoretical vein with two main orientations: queer presentism or anti-futurism (Edelman, 2004) and queer futurism (Muñoz, 2009). Edelman's *No Future* holds a firm line against ideals of futurity. Positioning queerness in tension with the forward momentum of biological reproduction and the psychological concern with achieving a stable and legible identity, he articulated a radical use of queer power. Embodying this disruption of the march to the future inspires resistance to a temporal system designed without queer people in mind. In this rejection of the future, queer people cannot ride off into the sunset, but they do not need or want to, anyway. Edelman's transformative mechanism is the death drive, or the desire to begin again, abandon the current timeline, and focus on the present.

As a model of queer futurism committed to intersectional queer identity, Muñoz (2009) vehemently opposed Edelman's (2004) queer presentism. One main critique he offered was the privileged position central to a rejection of futurity. Muñoz viewed queerness as aspirational, "a structuring and educated mode of desiring which allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (2009, p. 1). In other words, when the present is so uninhabitable, thinking toward the future is necessary for survival. For queer bodies with less social power, like queer people of color, reimagining a future is critical, life-saving work. Queer futurism is looking

forward when it is too painful to stay looking at the present and past. Without the hope of a better, queerer future, there is no hope to survive the present long enough to get there.

These two approaches share a collective understanding of the disruptive potential of queer time: interrupting the uncontested, dominant linear progression of time (Dinshaw et al., 2007). I see these two divisive theories working in alliance. With queer temporality's loose delineation of past, present, and future epochs, a focus on the present does not have to foreclose aspirations for the future. Rather, when the present is understood as both implicated by the past and shaping the future, the past and future start to blur into the present. In this way, a queer understanding of time makes a total rejection of any future impossible, for the future is now. Blurred timely epochs are central to my approach to queer ecological temporality.

Ecological temporality centers the chasm between human and ecological understandings of time. Ecological temporality is "the multiple, complex, contextual rhythms and processes of ecosystems" (Doyle, 2016, p. 26). In particular, it argues that humans have difficulty conceptualizing the vast expanse of ecological time which contributes to apathy and inaction in the face of climate change (Doyle, 2016; Shotwell, 2016; & Rush, 2018). If climate disaster is a concern of the distant future, a problem for future generations, it becomes less attractive to act now. Further, ecological temporality challenges neoliberal logics of production and consumption. While capitalist industries seek short-term benefits, ecological time reminds us of the centuries-long impacts of environmental degradation (Fitz-Henry, 2017). Ecological temporality is hard for us to conceptualize, in part because it is convenient to worry primarily about present rewards.

In my research, I have encountered no one directly naming queer ecological temporality. Seymour (2013) comes the closest in her work with the queer ecological imagination. Invoking

queer temporality, Seymour draws from Muñoz (2009) and critiques Edelman (2004). Queer presentism or anti-futurism is incompatible with sustainability because “environmentalism is future-oriented at its core” (Seymour, 2013, p. 150). Her model of queer ecological imagination uses expanded empathy for human and nonhuman subjectivities to form new attachments that drive greater concern for our shared survival. Drawing from both queer ecology and queer temporality, Seymour suggests queer ecological futurism.

What happens when ecological temporality is queered? The ability to differentiate between a present problem and a future problem decreases. Without a clear distinction of what is outside our realm of temporal concern, climate disaster becomes a problem for us now. Climate disaster is happening now. For many marginalized communities, it is already a reality (Rush, 2018). The ability to speculate about climate change as a problem of tomorrow (or the day after) is inherently privileged. In this way, queer ecological temporality is as much a theory as it is a practice of ecological justice. Drawing from Edelman (2004) and queer time (Dinshaw et al., 2007), I pursue a queer ecological temporality that reclaims and expands the present to recognize that the climate future has arrived faster than we realized.

Methodologies

To pursue queer human-nature relationships with climate disasters and ecological temporality, I employ critical textual analysis and critical evocative autoethnography. Following Griffin’s (2015) model of textual analysis, I trace pieces of narrative structure and plot in my text, the 1995 film *Waterworld*. In my analysis, I am concerned with researcher reflexivity and accountability for my role in reproducing dominant ways of knowing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Throughout, I center representations of natural elements like air, water, and fire to further

challenge culture's domination over nature. My critical textual analysis approaches *Waterworld* (1995) mindful of its cultural context and situation in larger systems of power and privilege.

To explicate queer ecological temporality, I use critical evocative autoethnography to explore my temporal experiences of coming out as queer and waiting for Hurricane Irma. Guided by Bochner and Ellis (2016), Boylorn and Orbe (2014), and Durham (2014), I remember and narrate my experiences. Emphasizing points of overlap between my queer and hurricane experiences, I apply temporal theories to understand my body as shaped by both space and time. Situating identity as cultural and co-constructed (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014), autoethnography provides important insights for this work. Throughout, I attend to my own complex positions of cultural privilege and precarity. My work with critical evocative autoethnography contributes to the overall project by centering the body in environmental communication theorizing.

Chapter Overview

Recalling my research question, I am asking: *How could a queer approach to climate disaster representation and experience transform how I understand the hurricane in terms of body, space, and time?*

To answer this overarching question, I employ two sub-questions for my two analysis chapters. Both my critical textual analysis and my autoethnography engage with entangled ontologies. My first analysis chapter engages with queer theories of ecological bodies as interconnected and active (see Alaimo, 2016; Tuana, 2007; & Shotwell, 2016). Performing an ecocritical textual analysis of the film *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), I explore alternative embodiments of human-nature relationships as a response to climate disaster on an apocalyptic scale. In this chapter, I ask, *what do elemental representations of climate disaster in Waterworld suggest about human-nature relationships?* I argue the film critiques the nature-culture binary

because it narrates the necessity of a different orientation toward the environment and toward concepts of the body itself in the face of overwhelming water.

My second analysis chapter performs critical autoethnography to emphasize the temporal interconnections of body, space, and time. Comparing my experience of Hurricane Irma and experiences formative to my queer identity, I engage with theories of ecological and queer temporality. Doing this work, I ask, *how does my temporal experience of Hurricane Irma in Tampa, Florida relate to my temporal experiences as a queer subject?* Analyzing these autoethnographies for their implications in temporal disruption and disruption of systems of power, I argue for queer ecological temporality as a way of reconceptualizing the disruption of hurricanes as an opportunity to reimagine responses to climate disaster.

In my fourth and final chapter, I summarize my argument and reflect on its contributions. Bringing the two analysis chapters back together, I return to address my overall research question. Together, these two analyses explore hegemonic and alternative ways of knowing and communicating the environment in film representations and embodied narratives of climate disasters. Looking for ways to reimagine responses to climate disaster, I see transformative potential in viewing hurricanes and other elemental climate forces as embodiments of disruption. Tracing the line between disruption and queered human-nature relationships will imagine queerness in the future, a realm it is arguably denied.

By intervening in the nature-culture binary, I theorize queer ecological temporality as an opportunity to overcome human understandings of temporality which are inadequate to respond to the long-reaching effects of climate disaster. In my work, I am queering my understanding of hurricanes in order to imagine climate disaster beyond the nature-culture binary. Ultimately, I argue a queer approach to climate disaster blurs the nature-culture binary and reimagines

ecological temporality. I also re-establish my contributions to queer theory, critical cultural studies, and environmental communication research. Putting my work into a larger scholarly context, I address potential limitations of this project and suggest avenues for future study of elemental texts and climate disasters. As I conclude with thoughts for queer ecocritical communication research, I encourage growing multiplicities of embodied knowledge.

Chapter Two: Queer Human-Nature Relationships in Climate Disaster Film *Waterworld*

Seeking alternative forms of human-nature relationships to usher in new responses to climate disaster requires a shift in perspective. Looking to transcend the nature-culture binary, I am bound by my own positionality. That is to say, I need additional inspiration for the forms which human-nature relationships may take. To reimagine my own response to hurricanes, the climate disasters I experience most often, I first need to rethink my underlying relationship to the ‘natural’ world. In the introduction, I related to Pezzullo and Cox’s (2018) definition of environmental communication as concerned with studying relationships to the natural world, in order to respond to ecological crises and care for all ecological inhabitants. Climate disaster, at a grand level of destruction ending life-as-I-know-it, feels blessedly far-off until a hurricane approaches my shores. If I am to consider the long-reaching impacts of climate disaster, on a larger ecological temporal scale, I need some help.

Viewing representations of climate disasters and natural elements as messy and active, I will perform ecocritical textual analysis on the fraught but important cli-fi film *Waterworld* (Reynolds 1995). To guide this work, I ask, *what do elemental representations of climate disaster in Waterworld suggest about human-nature relationships?* I argue that queering human-nature relationships, as imagined in the film, suggests different orderings of power over elemental bodies. Along the way, I explore alternative imaginings of power in a watery world where a business-as-usual approach to climate disaster is no longer an option. In a plot driven by the recovery from the collapse of industrialized society, I trace the different formulations of human-nature relationships and their moralization by the film. To call upon *Waterworld*

(Reynolds, 1995) as a text animating queer human-nature relationships, I first explicate my rationale for choosing this pop culture film and explain my approach to ecocritical textual analysis.

Richardson (2018) found aesthetic texts particularly useful in bridging the temporal gap between present and future disaster. According to Richardson, witnessing acts of climate change, even through mediated channels, affects climate trauma, a bodily response to the risk of future catastrophe. Focusing largely on climate change at a thematic level, Richardson also considered specific weather events as manifestations of the often-intangible phenomenon. If I approach films as “potential experiences of existence,” pop culture presents possible futures not-yet-realized (Richardson, 2018, p. 4). Loosely bound to reality by the imaginative limits of its creative team, a film can help viewers temporality divest from the constraints of the present. Engaging with a film, other forms of life can begin to take shape. For my work, I approach pop culture as a source of reimagining reality.

A foundational challenge to the paradigm of human-centered earthly existence comes in the title of the 1995 film depicting climate disaster from rising seas. In *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), the planet is no longer recognizable by its telltale continents. Instead, a perpetually vexing saltwater washes over civilizations and rocky formations alike, leaving a watery playground on which the survivors fight. The power of naming, here, becomes quite clear. The elemental forces which rose up in response to climate change took over, reasserting themselves as primary over the soil and rocks which bolstered human civilization. Not wholly reset, the world and all its inhabitants must now redefine themselves in relation to the water which consumed their old lives.

The film itself is, admittedly, quite strange. Accordingly, I struggle in writing to capture its whole messy appeal. For context, news articles about its filming speculated about its potential. At the time, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) was considered “the most expensive movie ever made,” with a reported budget of at least \$172 million (King, 1995, p. B2). In production, the film weathered major nonhuman setbacks. With many scenes taking place on open water or a floating set, crew struggled to set up and shoot footage (Eller & Welkos, 1994). The image of camera operators drifting away, helpless against the current, speaks to the oversaturation of the film and its production. Water, an element wreaking havoc on the fictional survivors, vexed the crew behind the camera as well. Even after being recorded and distributed across the world, the waters of *Waterworld* took their toll, running up production costs and driving up the much sought-after profit margin. After a mixed but generally generous critical reception and a hopeful opening weekend, the film did not earn on par with other epic blockbusters (Weinraub, 1995). In strictly financial terms, then, it seems *Waterworld* is an unabashed failure.

Nevertheless, I turn to this film for several reasons: (1) the centrality of water as a titular character shaping the narrative of the film and (2) the shared elemental relationship between characters and water. Recalling Bulfin’s (2017) definition of ecocriticism as a method centering the nonhuman, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) provides opportunities to engage with the elemental world from the very start. Various nonhuman elements are active participants in the film’s human-nature relationships.

Further, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) is a significant and early contribution to the genre of cli-fi, or climate fiction. In Bulfin’s (2017) review of catastrophe narratives, *Waterworld* is the earliest cited example. Further, Svoboda (2016) identified *Waterworld* as the earliest cli-fi film centering global flooding or sea level rise. After reviewing cli-fi films from 1984 to 2015,

Svoboda concluded that the majority depict extreme weather events as manifestations of climate disaster and recommended other areas of cli-fi receive more scholarly attention. In this project I engage both these perspectives. My interest in *Waterworld* is its more abstract level of engagement with climate disaster. By presenting the narrative 'end' of the line of climate disaster, I can explore how my own approach to human-nature relationships could be reimagined. While often overshadowed by more successful films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), *Waterworld* surely represents a notably historic and unique perspective on cli-fi and climate disaster.

Despite these citations in cli-fi scholarship, I could not locate any published scholarly textual analyses of *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995). Before I raise my final point in choosing *Waterworld*, I need to be transparent about why this might be the case. In comparison to more modern depictions of post-apocalyptic society, like the often-studied narrative of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (see Du Ploy, 2019; Pesses, 2019; Yates, 2017), *Waterworld's* application as a cite for ecocritical reimagining is muddy. I want to briefly account for the more problematic elements of the text, which fail to embody several tenets of diversity and social justice I expect for critical work.

Accordingly, I note the pervasive whiteness of the film. *Waterworld*, the film itself and the world it creates, are not welcoming to people of color. Protagonists and antagonists alike present as white, with characters who are visibly nonwhite scattered sparsely in the background. Additionally, toxic masculinity abounds when the main character displays one-sided aggression and violence toward fellow survivors Helen and Enola, a woman and a child. It seems even in this watery world, reborn, the narrative still depends on a white masculine gaze. But *Waterworld* is not a white utopia, the world itself is deeply flawed, seeking revival. Speaking into this vein,

in the spirit of a ‘yes, and’ interpretation, I reach for what Sedgwick (2003) called a reparative reading, looking for survival in unlikely, counter-intuitive, and fraught places.

Understanding one of the ethical complications of this work, I turn back to the potential I see in *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995). My final, and most comprehensive, reason for selecting *Waterworld* for this project is its congruence with this work’s theoretical alignments. As I engage with queer theory, I sought a text that invited queerness in form. Reflecting on the nearly two decades of special effects developments that have accrued since *Waterworld*’s release, the film’s visuals have not stood the test of time. Ever since its debut, one prevailing opinion seems to be that it is not technically very good, but watchable nonetheless (Maslin, 1995). This evokes the queer art of camp, succinctly described by Seymour (2013) as “I know it’s ugly/bad; I love it in spite of it being ugly/bad. I love it because it is ugly/bad” (p. 163). Camp gets its theoretical power from ironic subversion of expectations.

By embracing a film that is, by most accounts, low-quality or laughable, I am engaging the film’s queer and critical theoretical potential for transformation. In pursuing this project, I am turning my attention to a film which, ironically, becomes less far-fetched as we progress with climate change unmitigated. Choosing an outdated piece of cli-fi is an intentional queer move to deconstruct the association between recency and relevancy. My attention toward *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) is a critical and queer rereading, looking back when considering my future with climate disasters.

Ecocritical Textual Analysis

Preparing to perform ecocritical textual analysis of *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), I first explicate my approach to this method, building on previous research in critical textual analysis. Doing this work, I am primarily informed by the critical media studies approach to textual

analysis. Griffin's (2015) textual analysis of *The Help* (Tayler, 2011) provides a foundation for the methodology I will follow. Griffin's work outlines several preliminary steps for performing textual analysis: summarizing the film and applying relevant theory. In this project, Griffin engaged with the theory of strategic whiteness. Then, she analyzed how the characters are functioning in the overall structure of the film by identifying Skeeter as the film's white savior. I understand Griffin's approach to a film's narrative structure as the ways the narrative is designed to be received, or where the audience is meant to relate or feel distance. She described this as who "we are encouraged to root for" and why (p. 158). Finally, textual analysis relates back to its impact or situation in the world at the time of its release and/or analysis. By reviewing Griffin's work with critical textual analysis, I understand the method to be theoretically informed, text-based, and connected to a critique of cultural power.

I also attend to complex and contradictory representations in film characters. Dubrofsky and Ryalls (2014) used textual analysis to examine authentic femininity and whiteness in *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012). In their approach, they addressed the significance of the text in its contemporary context and included theory throughout an analysis of themes including surveillance, postracism, and exceptional whiteness. Noting visual elements like use of lighting and audio elements like dialogue, Dubrofsky and Ryalls argued that protagonist Katniss' heroism is interwoven with naturalized whiteness. They acknowledged the complexity of media representation wherein Katniss is both an icon for younger girls to admire as a strong female character and a figure complicit in representing whiteness as heroic and authentic. In my work with the Mariner of *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), I will share their dedication to considering multiple layers of meaning associated with film representations.

In addition to this process of observing predominant themes in the text and applying theory, I also account for how my position as a researcher may influence my analysis. Durham (2014) studied Queen Latifah and Beyoncé as popular representations of Black femininity and sexuality. Durham approached this interpretive research as textual experience, not analysis, because the researcher's interaction with the text animates it, giving it specific meanings based on the embodied experience of observing. In this way, there is not one true meaning of a film. Rather, there is a situated meaning cultivated through my embodied watching. Approaching *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) as an important cli-fi rendering of climate disaster, I consider what meanings I infuse in the narrative based on my identities and lived experiences.

Ecocriticism works in tandem with critical textual analysis while centering the natural or nonhuman. Pursuing an ecocritical project of elemental climate disaster in film, I am guided by Yates (2015), who performed ecocritical textual analysis of representations of water as a natural element. Yates was careful to avoid a grand narrative of the role of water. In the end, he found there is no end to wrestling with the elements' pull on our lives but allowing representations to be "momentary hostings of other orders of finitude than our own" and not grand narratives, we can grapple with elemental metaphors in a meaningful way (Yates, 2015, p. 205). Viewing elemental metaphors as significant but specific invites a complex understanding of human relationships to water without creating totalizing narratives which oversimplify processes of environmental communication. Grounding elemental projects in their embodied contexts, then, works dually to avoid replicating a nature-culture binary and avoid one trap of interpretive research. Ecocriticism, like critical work more broadly, is methodologically mindful of its own limitations while seeking foundational transformation.

Analyzing *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), I consider water an agential character in the plot because its various relationships to human characters shape the film's narrative arc. Gordon's (2020) analysis of *The Shape of Water* (del Toro, 2017) centered the queer ecologies that emerge when human and nature know each other intimately. Drawing from a posthuman, entangled philosophy of ontology and corporeality, Gordon connected to other cultural myths of mer-people. In the analysis, Gordon emphasized how watery characters and visuals flood the screen. By tying the film's representation of entangled human-nature relationships to the recent environmental problem of the Florida Red Tide bloom, Gordon (2020) situated a necessary ontological change within an ecological one. Here, with the Gulf of Mexico's ecologies becoming toxic, human culture needs to reconsider how we understand ourselves, and grow with nature rather than against it. I also center the role of water in my analysis and carry the ontological messages of *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) into my autoethnography of Florida hurricanes.

Taking on the additional influence of ecocriticism, my project incorporates both critical and ecocritical values. First, I approach critical methods as committed to reflexivity and transformation. Taking Denzin and Lincoln (2008) as guides, I understand that critical work is about seeking "research practices that are reflexively consequential, ethical, critical, respectful, and humble" (p. 9). Specifically, they engaged with a critical indigenous pedagogy to de-center the West's dominance in academic research. To work in alliance or solidarity with indigenous perspectives, I need to be accountable and reflexive of my privilege as a white Western scholar.

My engagement with human-nature relationships starts from a Western model of patriarchal domination over nature, what Craig (2016) called a humans-as-engineer environmental frame. Deviations from this model, such as alternative embodiments represented

in *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) are positioned as queer, which could risk reifying the dominance of the hegemonic frame. However, I feel ethically comfortable with the scope of this project because it is concerned with deconstructing the naturalness of this Western model. By refusing to accept the inherency of a nature-culture binary, my work begins to resist reproducing Western hegemony in academia.

Informed by these critical and ecocritical scholars, my work with textual analysis is grounded in reflexivity about what I bring to the research. My position on the topic comes from the historical and cultural context of the film and from my points of privilege as a white Western scholar, for whom the disasters of environmental degradation are still largely hypothetical. Accordingly, the points I raised about the film's problematic elements must be revisited in the analysis, to account for what else might be happening in the film. The main purpose of my work with *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) is advancing transformative ontologies, which challenges patriarchal and capitalistic systems of domination over nature. In this way, my work contributes to de-centering the West by critiquing this paradigm and its role in oppressing indigenous bodies, non-masculine identities, and ecological health.

Methodologically, I build my analysis following Griffin (2015), Dubrofsky (2014), Durham (2014), Yates (2015), and Gordon (2020). First, I summarize the film's narrative to ensure more accessibility for readers who are unfamiliar with it. Then, I interpret where I see the film working with the queer theories of body and space I identified earlier. To provide evidence for these claims, I cite relevant examples of dialogue and plot points and consider how they contribute to the film's overall structure. Regarding the film's overall argument, I am most interested in its alternative representations of human-nature relationships and power. Throughout, I approach power in a Foucauldian sense, as "an ongoing discursive

accomplishment” practiced and reified in relationships (McDonald, 2017, p. 2). Therefore, the relationships between characters, including nature and natural elements, cultivate *Waterworld’s* (Reynolds, 1995) narrative structure.

Essentially, I examine the arguments about bodies and space the film makes by narratively moralizing the actions of some and critiquing others. Ultimately, I argue that the film does not present all human-nature relationships as equally valid, favoring transformational formations of power and their underlying ontological change. Further, no characters are pure in relation to nature and no one is innocent in relation to the world’s systems of power. To put the film back into its temporal context, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) matters now precisely because it is dated. That it seems so laughable or campy, and yet the real-world conflict in its premise has not been resolved, underlines the urgency of new forms of responding to climate disaster which account for humanity’s responsibility and entanglement with the systems which perpetuate it.

Synopsis. By way of brief summary, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) represents multiple versions of survival in a world overwhelmed by sea level rise. Viewers first meet a mysterious lone survivor, who is never named but dubbed the Mariner. He lives in open ocean, captain of a tricked-out vessel equipped with a small lime tree, water filtration, and a rig to troll the ocean floor for scraps. He encounters fellow drifters to trade with before making his way to an atoll, a floating village guarded by water cannons. While bargaining for supplies, like freshwater, he is outed as a mutant for his gills and webbed feet.

Locked up, he is set to be executed when the atoll is attacked by Smokers, a rival group. The Smokers bring fire and guns to the battle, intent on destruction. In the chaos, atoll refugees Helen and Enola flee with the Mariner, freeing him in exchange for safe passage. Helen and Enola are seeking Dryland, a mythic last hope mapped onto young Enola’s back. The Mariner’s

alliance with them is uneasy, as he resents their interference and presence, lashing out them in varying degrees of aggression. The Smokers, tipped off about Enola's map to Dryland, pursue them in hopes of claiming the land and its resources for their own.

When Enola is captured, the Mariner rescues her and destroys the Smokers' base, an old oil tanker. The Mariner, Helen, and Enola are reunited with Gregor, a survivor from the atoll who invented a crude airship. They follow the directions to Dryland, finding a lush island with evidence of Enola's now-dead family. As the film ends with them settling-in to life on the island, the Mariner slips away, heading back to the open ocean.

Analyzing human-nature relationships. Moving to my analysis, I consider how three types of human-nature relationships represented in the film relate to ecocritical theories of nature as an active agent and human bodies as porous. *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) suggests that human-nature relationships need to transform to meet the challenges of climate disaster. For each representation, I consider its role in *Waterworld*'s power structures shifting with the times, its engagement with nature-as-space, and its concept of the body. The film narrates that bodies need to be viscerally entangled with the elements and old systems which oppress elemental bodies need to be left behind.

First, I will address the Smokers, the most ardent ambassadors for a nature-culture binary, to prepare for a radical departure to other ontologies. Not choosing to adapt or transform in response to the climate disaster, they cling to the vestiges of old-world power, fueling their lifestyle with the last drops of gas available on the planet. Their very base, the rusty Exxon Valdez, invokes the capitalist power of controlling petroleum. Their leader, the Deacon, professed himself "spiritual shepherd and dictator for life" (Reynolds, 1995). He claims spiritual inspiration from Saint Joe, the Exxon Valdez' captain whose picture still hangs in the halls. The

body, specifically the white male body, holds power over other human and elemental bodies.

During a sermon to the crew, where he addressed the crowd with Jack Daniels in one hand and a cigarette in the other, he proclaimed his visions of Dryland: “If there’s a river, we’ll dam it. And if there’s a tree, we’ll ram it. [...] Dryland is not just our destination. It is our destiny”

(Reynolds, 1995). Perpetuating a narrative of white men’s manifest destiny to expand and conquer all ‘untouched’ lands, the Smokers’ society maintains an ideology of masculine consumption.

The Smokers demonstrate ontological porosity even though their relationship with water is highly detached. They travel on jet skis, skimming along the surface of the ocean and kicking up water in their wake. Most frequently, entering the water means death for Smokers. In battle, once they fall into the water, they are not seen re-emerging. Their porosity comes from their relationship to fire, instead. Smokers are nearly continually shown around fire, with fighter pilots even lighting up a cigarette mid-battle. Unfortunately for them, the new reality is not Fireworld. Their relationship with fiery elemental bodies and avowed distance from the water surrounding them spells destruction. By maintain a distant relationship with water, the Smokers hold onto an old era of human-nature relationships. Their society is out of time. The Mariner drops a lit flare into their oil supplies, sparking an explosion which sinks the Exxon Valdez. As the Smokers die in a string of explosions, the last monument to the long regime of oil dies with them.

Whereas the Smokers are not adapted to the omnipresent water, the survivors in the atoll represent adaptation to Waterworld without overarching transformation of power. When the Mariner arrives to trade, the atoll quickly demonstrates a civility like a Wild West outpost. He is quickly greeted by the de facto town sheriff, who warns him not to start trouble and gives him two hours to do his business. The Mariner’s entry is justified by his utility, which he

demonstrated by bartering with his valuable jar of dirt. The only parts of the atoll featured on screen are the store and a small garden. Both these features of their environment serve vital subsistence roles, suggesting the atoll is governed by utility.

The people of the atoll demonstrate a severe intolerance toward difference, as evidenced by their reaction to the Mariner's mutation. Upon revealing his gills, they mean to kill him, stopped only by the sheriff insisting he deserves proper justice. Arguing that he is "too strange for life," they rule to execute him "in the interest of public safety" (Reynolds, 1995). By holding the line about which bodies they will accept into their space, they mark their distinction from a new species better adapted to their world. Emphasizing the unnaturalness of the Mariner's mutant body, the atoll people are firmly rooted in the present—humans still dominate and change reaching toward future survival is a threat.

Nevertheless, the atoll survivors demonstrate several important adaptations which facilitate their survival. Their relationship to nature and concept of the body are much more fluid than the Smokers'. Water is used as a standard converter of currency in their economic system, with the Mariner's dirt being valued as quantities of "pure hydro" (Reynolds, 1995). They also serve up hydro like alcohol at a bar, which the Mariner realizes when other survivors berate him to buy them a drink. Saltwater also serves an important purpose. When the Smokers raid the atoll, they are met with powerful blasts from water cannons. Despite recognizing water in various forms as a vital resource, it still plays a utilitarian, rather than collaborative, role in their survival. As survivor Helen notes, they just "weren't made for the sea" (Reynolds, 1995).

Despite the relative distance they maintain toward the water around them, they frequently challenge the limits of ontological purity. The atoll garden is fertilized by a pool of green sludge which also serves as the town's graveyard. The Mariner observes a funeral where an elderly

woman is deposited into the concoction amid the last rites of “Bones to berries, veins to vine” (Reynolds, 1995). This recycling of human matter makes the trees more chemically human, and the human body “potential dirt,” in the words of the Mariner (Reynolds, 1995). Recycling and contaminating the human body in this way marks a considerable innovation in relating to the environment, while the Smokers’ reliance on fire continues themes of Western destruction and consumption. Where the Smokers clung to fire, the atoll survivors rely on earth. In the end of their narrative, they make it to Dryland and presumably settle there. While unwilling or unable to live on water, their behavioral and cultural adaptations to Waterworld accompany an impure and porous ontology.

In *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), it is certainly better to be on the run from the fire, seeking a return to Dryland not for its resources, but its safety. Still, the addition of the Mariner’s relationship to water brings in another layer of complexity. In the apocalyptic society, the Mariner is at risk as a markedly mutated body but he still has economic and gender-based power over others. His collection of material artifacts makes him rich in the atoll and with other drifters. Passing for a while as a human male, he is free to travel without the threat of gender-based violence, often being complicit in it himself. Atoll elders attempt to include him in their heterosexual reproduction, begging him to impregnate one of the local girls. When he refuses, his body is examined under the suspicion of deviance. Finding gills, they declare him a mutant, a queer body not fit for their society.

While he generally utilizes the cover of masculine privilege for the first half of the film, he does suddenly reject this power arrangement by renegeing on a barter he established with a drifter. He had agreed to give him thirty minutes of access to Helen’s body, without her consent. Before the assault is shown, the Mariner intervenes, attacking the drifter. From this point on, his

relationship to atoll survivors Helen and Enola changes. He is less antagonistic toward them, sharing his crayons with Enola and teaching her how to swim. While he does later use violence to infiltrate the Smoker base and rescue Enola, his heroic potential is more solidly fermented when he ends the displays of one-sided violence.

His relationship with water is the most collaborative, as his mutated fish body might suggest. He dives and swims for long periods of time to scavenge the ocean floor. He facilitates others' education about water, as well, taking Helen and Enola underwater. While teaching Enola to swim, he instructs her to "let the water tell [her] arms and legs how to move" (Reynolds, 1995). The Mariner listens to the water, communicating with it in a more nuanced way than the Smokers who stay on top of it and the atoll who deploys it only as they see fit. Most tellingly, the Mariner is always eager to return to the water. He hurries to leave the atoll after his business is done and rejects a life on land, even though it would bring human companionship and stability. His sense of belonging is elsewhere; the open water is his space. Rejecting both human civilization and conventions of naming, the Mariner's way of being in *Waterworld* is highly queer. His body is porous enough, breathing in seawater. His behavioral adaptations are all the more so, as he embraces the impurity of being a mutant and seeks his own way of life.

Waterworld (Reynolds, 1995) follows the Mariner's voyages from open to close, tracking his character development from gruff loner to sympathetic nomad. The Mariner is a mutant ahead of his time. His body, suspected to be the first of its kind, offers the ontologically challenging prospect of post-human life. Linked to water where humans avoid it, the Mariner suggests the impossibility of dominant and distanced relationships to nature-as-space. Along the way, his queer ecological body rejects human civilization, going so far as to vanquish the remnants of the capitalist regime of expansion. Based on these details, the greedy, fuel-burning

Smokers are the clear antagonist, with the woman and child characters of Helen and Enola providing both a redemptive arc for the gruff Mariner and a narrative end. The ending aerial shot pans back from Helen and Enola on the cliff side to show the Mariner sailing away, widening the audience's perspective and keeping his watery existence in our gaze even as humans return to Dryland.

The film's opening line proves correct: "Those who survived have adapted to a new world" (Reynolds, 1995). This new world, consumed by water, requires new ways of living besides capitalist consumption. When they make it to Dryland, the atoll survivors cherish the newfound freshwater, reveling in its abundance. The Mariner, to go a step further, loves the messy, troubling saltwater that doomed the old world. The Smokers, with their love of fire and militaristic destruction, have no place in *Waterworld*. A collaborative relationship between more-than-human bodies and expanding natural spaces emerges in their place.

Of course, it bears noting that *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) also functions like a masculine power fantasy. The Mariner takes pride in being self-reliant, needing no help piloting his vessel, gathering food, or fending off attackers. On the contrary, having Helen and Enola on his boat slows him down. He wants to have complete control over his ship punishes them for any perceived slights. In their world, there are no consequences for choosing to violate another's bodily autonomy and no higher authority to judge him. This makes his decisions not to sexually assault Helen upsettingly admirable. When she later asks why he restrained himself, he says it was because he knew she "didn't really want it" (Reynolds, 1995). By showing the basest consideration and respect for others' consent, he is already leagues ahead of most other on-screen men.

This masculine appeal makes the film's divergence from a narrative of Western conquest all the more significant. That a film this steeped in masculine autonomy and power fantasies finds a way to critique overconsumption of natural resources is downright transcendent. Human-nature relationships in this film are highly moralized, with more collaborative approaches to nature aligning with heroic figures. Directing viewers to root for a recycling mutant, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) urges us to consider alternative ways of being to survive climate disaster. A film that is admittedly bad and outdated does not look any less relevant to me in 2019, when I still experience climate disaster as both annual storms and impending apocalypse. As I picture myself scrambling for higher ground, *Waterworld* urges me to take to the water like a fish and avoid a life of fire.

Discussion

Alternative ways of being and relating to the environment emerge through this analysis of one popular representation of climate disaster. By taking a weird and often over-the-top approach to imagining climate disaster, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) looks beyond strict limits to the human form. While the various groups of survivors cope differently with their restructured space, they all must reckon with the onslaught of water one way or another. For the Mariner, water is a comfortable home. For the atoll survivors and the Smokers, water is a commodity and a challenge to overcome. In both the latter cases, an antagonistic and detached relationship with water proves disastrous. Such an arrangement of human-nature relationships can no longer function. These outmoded forms of elemental relationships spell trouble for social power, as well. In *Waterworld*, elemental exploitation and human inequality go hand in hand. In representing a collaborative and porous relationship with water as heroic and advantageous,

Waterworld suggests that adapting away from patterns of consumption and lifestyles which perpetuate systems of elemental inequality is not only admirable, but necessary.

Representations of climate disaster, like the one in *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), provide important insight into possible alternative forms of human-nature ontological and power relationships. Throughout, I have addressed ethical implications of several aspects of the film which limit the transformational potential of the narrative. Where the film reproduces a white masculine ideal of adaptation and survival, I hesitate to laud the film for its transgressive representations of the human body. Nevertheless, its attempts to contest the Mariner's body as a site of white male power are an engaging entry point into reimagining relating to climate disaster. Here, perhaps the whiteness of the Mariner is essential. *Waterworld* is not merely perpetuating a fantasy of white expansion and power; it is critiquing it. Where the Smokers fervently cling to systems which keep them at the top, the Mariner changes his own position of power by adapting his relationships with water and other survivors. *Waterworld* is not placing the burden on embodied queerness, as the Mariner is theoretically but not interpersonally queer. Instead, it is calling for those who might relate to the Mariner, for their privileges of power from whiteness or masculinity, to rethink their approach to living with a world caught up in the elements.

While this does not in any way mean *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) is not still critically flawed, it does speak to the underlying ethical commitments of my ecocritical textual analysis. By marking *Waterworld's* engagement with whiteness and Western orientations toward power, I situate the film as a potential entry point for alternative ontologies which put bodies in collaborative relationships with space. Through my analysis, I find *Waterworld* transforms the nature-culture binary by positioning a mutated, fluid embodiment as its protagonist. Still, my

reclaiming of the *Waterworld* narrative is complicated by my position as a researcher doing this interpretive work. Coming from places of privilege as a white Western scholar, I can identify with the Mariner. Perhaps seeking his redemption is partly an effort to resolve my own complicity in the system he represents. Still, reconciling his queerness with his masculine privilege in the world speaks more to my experience as a queer scholar, making this a claim I feel more comfortable making. Understanding some of my influence over this interpretive work, I offer my arguments here in the hopes of deconstructing and reconstructing the body of the Mariner which both accepts and transcends his points of power in *Waterworld*.

By exploring different possible responses to climate disaster, I have begun to loosen my own hold on a nature-culture binary formation of human-nature relationships. Queer elemental bodies like the Mariner and their adaptive relationships with nature represent survival in climate futures. In the next chapter, I will explore experiences of temporality during climate disaster. *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) has provided an important touchstone for a future in which a business-as-usual approach to relating to nature and ‘natural’ disasters is no longer possible. When I take fictive imaginings of climate futures seriously, I can open myself up to alternative climate presents. Challenging my underlying ontological orientation toward climate disaster is essential to queering my experience of time and timely epochs in hurricanes. Turning toward autoethnography, a highly personal method, I will continue to consider the ways in which my positions of power situate my relationship to the work and to nature itself.

Chapter Three: We're Living in Queer Times: Autoethnography of Queer Ecological Temporality

I am fighting for my life. As I write these words, I feel the unrelenting rush of time circling me. I feel the buzzing threads of history snaking around my feet. I am rooted in place. I can only hope to grow up. Growing up in this place, Florida, as a queer subject, calls me to bounce from disaster to disaster. I have limited civil rights and my life is threatened, annually. Hurricane season, lasting from June to December, reminds me of the place of precarity I know I always occupy. I never imagined a hurricane would feel so much like home.

In the pages that follow, I wind my way through stories of frozen time, with past and future swallowed by the present. I remember the uneasy nights waiting to come out to loved ones, lying awake waiting for Hurricane Irma to make landfall, and waiting to come out to them again. These moments cry out to each other. Recalling these precipitous moments of waiting, I connect two of my academic interests: queer theory and environmental communication. Thinking between these disciplines, I ask, *how does my temporal experience of Hurricane Irma in Tampa, Florida relate to my temporal experiences as a queer subject?* In response, I offer queer ecological temporality as a tentative theoretical alliance, an uneasy guide to help us navigate the uncertain era of climate disaster.

A great source of debate in itself, I approach queer temporality as nonlinear and messy (Dinshaw et al., 2007). From the environmental side, I understand ecological temporality as nature time, unconcerned with short-term human aspirations (Fitz-Henry, 2007). Living in this intersection, I use evocative and critical autoethnography to suggest queer ecological temporality as climate futures collapsing into the present, demanding we remember the lessons we learn from

disaster to disaster. This project advances the theoretical work of queer ecology (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010) by using temporality to bridge queer and environmental studies. Within environmental communication, I am transforming the ways we understand human-nature relationships (Pezzullo & Cox, 2018). Nestled under the umbrella of queer ecology, I contribute a theoretical orientation that queers heterosexist and dualistic understandings of nature (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010). This autoethnography suggests a theoretical development of interest to both critical queer and environmental communication scholars: queer ecological temporality. By exploring the intersections between queer and elemental experiences, I offer a transformative understanding of hurricanes and other climate disasters.

Critical Evocative Autoethnography

Coming to the method. Autoethnography guides my use of personal narrative to implicate and theorize systems of queerness and ecological survival. According to Bochner and Ellis (2016), autoethnography is a method particularly well-suited to studying identity in relation to cultural and systemic influences. Evocative autoethnography, particularly, uses specific details to show readers the self in relation to culture and identity. As it continues to take root in academic scholarship, autoethnography is transgressive—it challenges the detached researcher and privileges emotional, embodied accounts. A method that invites new ways of seeing and showing, autoethnography suits my critical environmental work.

My autoethnography is critical as well as evocative. Critical autoethnography relates to evocative autoethnography because both invite readers to share a visceral experience (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Autoethnographers Boylorn and Orbe identified critical autoethnography's distinct attention to contextualizing lived experience within underlying systems of power and oppression. Throughout, I attend to my positionality as a person experiencing both privilege and precarity.

Taking up queer themes and stories of elemental survival evokes vulnerability, but it is important to ground these moments in my larger lived experience—as a white middle-class scholar, I also have class and race privileges in queer and elemental systems (Johnson, 2001; Tuana, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to understand my narratives as situated within ongoing cultural power dynamics.

I am drawn to autoethnography for this project for several reasons, including autoethnography's approach to story as theory. Bochner and Ellis (2016) noted how a narrative's emergent themes speak to larger cultural and social theories. Moving beyond merely analyzing a story for its aesthetic value to consider how it resonates with theory makes autoethnography transformative. In this way, an individual story may serve as a case study for a broader research topic. In this project, my narratives of coming out as queer and experiencing Hurricane Irma speak to cultural narratives of forming identity and disaster response.

Recalling and retelling my memories of emerging disaster, I reconcile two disruptive and formative entities in my Florida upbringing: hurricanes and queer identity. From Durham's (2014) approach to autoethnography, this work is "mind-mining excavation of experience" (p. 20). Writing on her experiences of girlhood and Black identity, Durham's writing called her home to understand how representations of Black femininity and memory work shift the sands of cultural studies. In this space, she breathed poetry between textual analyses of popular culture and emphasized the affective to "bear witness to the psychic economy of poverty" (p. 22). My experiences of time and place in my memories are ecological—grounded not in interpersonal interactions but in the interactivity of elemental forces. Throughout, I face elements like wind, water, and a quiet but crackling fear of violence rumbling in from the Gulf of Mexico. Turning

inward, I evoke the visceral and emotional to understand the unspoken toll of being here and being queer.

I use autoethnography to do this queer work because it engages a complex temporality and helps marginalized groups make their voices heard. Adams and Holman Jones (2011) argued that queer theory works well with autoethnography because both value disrupting static identity categories and fixed epistemological assumptions. Further, autoethnography recognizes the interplay between past and present by highlighting “the connection between the present *in which* we remember and the past *of which* we remember” (Bochner, 2007, p. 199). Autoethnography suits my temporal theorizing by acknowledging the fuzzy lines between these time periods. Autoethnography also supports my queer orientation toward this work because it helps amplify marginalized voices and experiences (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). This is particularly important within communication studies, which has routinely marginalized and demonized queer scholarship (Fox, 2013). Accordingly, I turn to autoethnography acknowledging my own precarity, hoping to use my points of privilege to offer a transformative and liberating theory.

Performing this work, I identify two main areas of ethical concern—the responsibilities of memory work and characterizing other people. Bochner (2007) addressed the difficulties with writing the past, noting, “memory never provides unmediated access to the past as it was; indeed, memory work is itself a form of mediation, of rewriting, revising, remembering, and recounting” (p. 206). This reminds me that my remembering of the past is a construct of itself, one interpreted through my own contextualizing and sense-making. Remembering is a mediated representation of experience all its own. For Durham (2014), memory work is fundamental to hip hop feminism as an active reclaiming and reconsidering forgotten feelings. Autoethnography is not so much a looking back as it is a looking in, formed by reflexive images and fragments

coalescing and fusing in our minds. This challenges me to be all the more reflexive about my own limits as a researcher—my mind is flawed.

I know my mind is flawed. It is an uneasy realization, certainly. My status in academic life depends on my use of my mind and a quick recollection of both basic and higher-order theories. Why can't I remember yesterday? I can and I cannot. There is an uneasy fog surrounding me, loosening my grip on the recent and distant past. I'm supposed to write about something life changing. I can't remember what my life used to be; how will I know how it has changed? How has my identity changed? I don't know what it is now so I surely can't tell you what it used to be. I wasted a good part of the semester straining to remember. Autoethnography is remembering. I need to remember.

I give myself a break; I sleep; I relax. I unshackle myself from the keyboard and go outside. When my breaths start to come easier, so do the memories. "An ethic of memory obliges us to understand that the sort of truth to which we aspire...can never be unvarnished" (Bochner, 2007, p. 206). I am not pure, neither are my memories.

Bochner and Ellis (2016) addressed the ethical complications of writing about others. They asked whether those who appear in your stories, masked or unmasked, have the right to inform how they are represented and give feedback. In my work with autoethnography, I navigate this ethical question by centering my visceral experience of situations. Beyond evocatively communicating my emotional responses to others in the narrative, this means I deidentify other people as much as possible. Instead, I animate aspects of my environment to evoke feelings of judgment, fear, inadequacy, etcetera, that I initially felt directly from an experience with an individual. My stories here are still relational, evoking elemental relationships rather than strictly human ones. My identities are situated in sociopolitical contexts,

marked in these narratives by features of the environment. I understand my body and its position in space and time through relating to nature. In addition to navigating the ethically fraught question of representing others, it works to recognize an expanded notion of agency (Seymour, 2013). By moving the action from the person to an object, I can expand notions of life and agency while avoiding implicating specific people who may be known to readers.

I also utilize this strategy with retelling dialogue. Rather than have another character speaking to me, as putting words in a fictionalized person's mouth marked with quotation marks may convey a sense of direct truth, it is clear that when an object speaks to me, it did not directly do so. After all, as my autoethnography is memory work, I need to be careful about claiming how events historically happened. Even though these are stories, they are riddled with the sense of truth, as I convey how they happened. My use of objects and elemental characters help me approach this ethical quandary of autoethnography.

Guided by evocative and critical autoethnography, I approach my queer ecological narrative with few reassurances. I do not know everything I remember. I do not know what I will find when I recall or how that remembering will feel. I do not know if it is better to abject responsibility onto nonhuman objects. I know my work remembering will always be incomplete, in flux, expanding. I know I will make my way through it to some narrative end. I wish I knew more.

Waiting to come out. I know I'm queer.

This secret consumes me. It makes my brain itch, occupying all available space. My tongue tingles, begging to let it slip. I know I'm queer, but I don't know why I'm scared. Secluded in my bedroom, I try to figure out what it means. I peek over my shoulder at any sound, watching for the door to open. My internet search history is the only clue I leave:

What if I have a crush on my best friend; bisexual; biphobia; bi pride; LGBT; LGBT laws; LGBT murder

Hunched over my laptop, I scan through articles detailing the violence and hatred LGBTQ communities face around the world. I know it's not usually happening here, in south Florida, in a well-off retirement town. If it did happen, it probably wouldn't be me. A white queer female kid with financial stability is less a target than a trans woman of color facing economic precarity (Griffin, 2016). I know it could happen, though, here or somewhere else. I know it isn't easy, being queer.

I've never had a culture before. That is, my group identities have always passed unmarked—white, Western, middle-class, able-bodied. But having a culture, one that is fighting to overcome oppression and discrimination—that's new. If my newfound culture is at war, I want to join. There's a lot they don't teach you in high school. For one, what do you do when who you are expected to be and who you always thought you would be is no longer a possibility?

I have a lot to learn.

I bike to the library under the pretense of getting homework done. I'm hit with the building's humid air, a suffocating blend of outdated air-conditioning and judgmental silence from the rows of shelves. They loom over me, daring me to disturb them. I hug the exterior wall and skirt around to the politics and social issues section. My eyes dart between reading the titles on the spines and looking out of the corner of my eye for interference. I lock onto my target—it's not hard to find, the damn thing has a rainbow cover.

It's even more vibrant in my hand. I use my hands to hide as much of the cover art as possible. I check to make sure the coast is clear. There's no one to the left and no one to the

right. Slowly, I crack the book open. It screams like a soul trapped on the wrong side of death, “QUEER!”

I slam it shut, wrapping my body around it to muffle the sound. There’s no sign of alarm around me, all the other books just whisper faintly to themselves. I wonder, fleetingly, if the book I picked up is mad to be disturbed or desperate to be heard.

I head home with my prize tucked away in my backpack. It lives there until it’s safe. That night, I nervously pull it out. I need to assess the damage. Reading by flashlight, it turns out it’s worse than I thought. I don’t know how I’m going to survive this. The problems all seem so big. I’m not able to marry a same-sex partner. I’m not protected from employment discrimination based on my sexuality. Thanks, Florida. How can I breathe air polluted by centuries-long hate? Testing the stale air in my bedroom, I choke and cough. I pile all my pillows and extra blankets on top of me, hoping their familiar weight can still my convulsing lungs. It doesn’t stop the crying, but it does muffle it significantly. I shiver, despite the warmth. My body heaves, desperate to purge whatever toxin I’ve inhaled. Trapped in a cocoon of dread, I don’t want to know anymore.

I hover on the edge of sleep, a dark space of tangled thoughts and silence, trying to imagine my life. More than that, I’m trying to imagine tomorrow. I don’t know how to wake up and go to school like everything is normal. How do I give a presentation when I’m afraid of even taking the first breath? I breathe shallowly under my covers, trying to block out the chaos I now see swirling around me. I’m afraid of myself, not here in this space but when I appear, in full queer glory, to the world. I don’t know how long I have before my secret’s out and everyone knows.

The knowing is harder than I thought. It hurts to know my identity is used to delegitimize my voice, calling me sinful and immoral (Fox, 2013). I'm not strong enough to talk back to it. I swallow my anger and let it build. There's a low-burning fire in my stomach, eating away at my organs. It burns away whatever tissue is responsible for self-preservation. I have no future. The story I had been rehearsing, of a husband and two kids living happily ever after, is gone (Edelman, 2004). It's not that it's been erased, exactly. I can still see it but only barely. It's just visible enough to compare myself against, reminding me of what will not be.

The next morning, I square up in front of the mirror, trying to see if I'm still salvageable. My eyes settle on the reflection of my hips. They're wide, womanly, ready to produce children. I run my hands over them, gently smoothing out my pajamas. My hips jut out too far, rounding me out like a pear. Studying my hips, I can hear the wedding bells, sending me off into a life of marriage and children. I could fill out a wedding dress just right. Looking back up at my face, I realize I'm frowning. My grimace is cloudy in the reflection, the mirage of that tidy impossible future overcrowding me. My fingers on my hips dig in hard. Pressing my hips in, I fight to bend them concave. I don't need that vision of myself. I can create a new one.

I decide I don't need normal. I'm not normal. I don't want to ever be normal. Being queer is a game to me and I'm determined to win. It's like bringing checkers to a chess game: I can't be beaten because I'm not playing by the same rules. My body and sexuality are no longer defined by my past. Life is suddenly deeply exciting and aggressively dangerous. A history I never learned opens up to welcome me. I have a new future and a new past, both constantly shifting out of my perception and leaving me flailing. In these moments, I push at the borders of my vision to catch a glimpse of what constantly evaded me. On no discernable path, I wander through schools, jobs, and relationships. All the while, I feel flighty, never with two feet on the

ground. One is always floating, trying to elevate me and make me untouchable. The other foot stays firmly planted, reminding me of my reality. I am still a body in the world. I keep coming crashing down, shying away from the sparkle of queer possibility. I play it safe.

I put the pain of coming out to myself away, in a tidy box labeled “Bad Memories.” I lock it up behind walls of tight smiles and cheap laughs. I know who I am; I’ve grown; I’ve learned. It’s over now. I can breathe.

Waiting for Irma. This isn’t my first hurricane season, or second, or third. Specifically, it’s my twentieth. I should be a practiced expert at basic storm survival by now. The thing about growing up in Florida is, even though hurricanes are routine, they aren’t normal. The hot months between June and December become a period of unprecedented precarity as Florida’s vulnerable geographic location takes center stage. I am used to seeing storms like her hovering over the Gulf of Mexico, twirling beyond the horizon. There is still something quite strange about it though. Town has a way of turning upside down when we get in the weather channel’s cone of prediction. Like a dark cloud settling over the state, people drop everything and scramble for higher ground. For me, it’s a process of compulsive television watching, NOAA website refreshing, and water bottle hoarding.

One big difference this year, I’m in Tampa. In the past, I’d hunker down in Naples with my family. This time, I’m off at college, staring down the storms alone. Like clockwork, a tropical storm starts to form in the Atlantic Ocean. As Hurricane Irma clicks closer on the weather charts, everyday objects around me start to transform. I don’t care about my textbooks anymore. They sit in the corner of my desk, collecting dust. Neglected, they watch me frantically refresh the weather report, waiting for the evening update. The storm shifts closer to our shores.

Sitting numbly in class, all I can think of are trashcans, the big curbside ones. I don't have any, I live in a dorm. How am I going to collect water? I don't have a trashcan, I live in a dorm. Some people fill up bathtubs. I don't have one, I live in a dorm. Where am I going to go? I don't have a car, I live in a dorm. What do I do when my phone dies? I don't have a generator, I live in a dorm.

Classes carry on as usual. The desks around me radiate the same nervous tension. A growing collective hysteria seeps into my sweaty skin. I don't have a trashcan. I don't have a bathtub. I don't have a generator. All I can remember is what I lack. Nevermind the fact I live in a dorm, within a larger university housing system to take care of me. No, I don't have a trashcan. I'm going to die. I don't have a bathtub. I'm going to die. I don't have a generator. I'm going to die. I have so much but I'm going to die.

I don't know why I'm afraid. I'm not in immediate bodily danger. I'm not really in bodily danger, period. I have the means to evacuate and take most of my important things with me. The fear, then, is irrational. The fear is gripping. Faced with the promise of disruption, I cannot remember how to function normally.

Irma clicks closer. She dances offshore, sucking up water over the Caribbean. Florida is squarely in the path now, the prediction cone swallowing the entire state. In a feverish daze, I hurry to reinforce my dorm room. Forlorn, I stare out the window. A tall, gangly tree lives just outside. Usually, it's a source of privacy and comfort. But now, I feel betrayed. Imagining the heavy limbs crashing into my life in a windstorm, I realize it was beyond my control all along. Trees reach to the sky, traversing the air in ways humans are too short to imagine. They are still subject to the same punishing winds. Maybe they are just trying to survive, too. Maybe I should forgive the tree for threatening my panes.

Reconciliation won't stop flooding, though. Breathing hard, I tape towels under the windows in case of a leak. I fix a trash bag around the entire window frame. I heave my twin extra-long mattress off the bed frame. It leans indelicately against an interior wall. My electronics whine as they get unplugged and stuffed into higher shelves in the closet. I don't stop to think about how much of a pain this will be to restore later. I don't think there will be a later to worry about. There won't be time later. I need to lock it down now. I just need to survive right now. No matter where Irma lands, I can do this now. I come up for breath and look around. It looks like the hurricane has already hit. Maybe mentally it has.

I don't know who I blame. It somehow feels more outrageous to seek a permanent solution, like moving out of the state, than to board up my dorm room like it's the end times. I don't blame Irma. She doesn't know we're trying to plot her every move. She doesn't care about delaying my Friday exam. She doesn't apologize for her strength. If we have a hand in making her kind stronger, that isn't her fault (Kang & Elsner, 2015). But how do I forgive when hurricanes bring so much destruction and death (Tuana, 2007)? How do I appreciate hurricanes for this insight when they threaten lives not my own? Am I the monster?

I am not weighted down by a job anchoring me in Irma's path. I am free, free enough to pack up the car and head across town to wait out the storm with family friends. The night Irma is set to make landfall, I stretch out for an uneasy sleep. I pull up the covers even though my legs are already sticking to the couch. The air conditioning has left us to fend for ourselves. Still, I need the reassuring weight of a few layers of protection. Sweat settling back into my pores, I listen. Irma has evaded our surveillance, cutting out the power. Without the relentless broadcasting of every local weather studio, I am lost. I strain to hear her arrival. I whisper to her to be kind:

I am sorry we are in your way. Please realize how strong you are. Please know we are not strong in the same ways. Please understand, I know it doesn't make sense, this life we are living. But I would like to keep living it.

In response, she sighs mightily. A branch hits the roof, and then another.

I nod. *I'm sorry I forgot about you.*

Irma howls and I pull the covers over my head. In the darkness, I feel Irma in the winds battering the house. I remember all the years I shouldn't have forgotten. I feel all of them. As I huddle in the spare room, I am also holed up in my parents' bedroom closet with a flashlight and crank radio. I am young again, avoiding windows and coveting my water. As the pool outside overflows with the deluge, I feel the water swirling around my legs as streets in low-lying cities flood. I apologize to those without shelter, those neglected and forgotten during Katrina (Tuana, 2007). I apologize for all the people in my own city who I did not think to protect. I apologize for putting hurricanes out of my mind until Irma came along.

Sure, I could see Irma before, a discrete and impending wall of water and wind dominating our television. A green and yellow swirl cutting across the blue Gulf below. In her wake, it's all blue, water swept up and spat out. But to feel her is to know it's not just Irma, not just hurricane season, but also a larger manifestation of a world swirling into chaos. A climate gone wild, mocking us for ever thinking it was under our control. It is the future, and the past, crashing down on our refuge like a storm surge. Hurricanes are not relegated to a background concern most of the year because it is a smart thing to do. I push hurricanes out of my mind because remembering them is all too painful and I am too weak. Staring down oblivion drains a person.

Coming back to coming out. What does the men's restroom look like? Tell me its blue. Tell me it's a tailored suit. Tell me it is actually doubling as a garage, with mechanics standing at the ready. Tell me it's recreational contact sports. Tell me. Is it blue?

The women's room is pink. Tiles, pink and sickly. Tiles with gray grout. Tiles that make the sound boom. Tiles that, were they polished, would reflect my own face back at me. Tiles see everything. They see me, crammed into the corner stall. Tiles hear my shallow breaths, punctuated by my hammering heart. They see me peeking through the crack in the door to see who's out there. Tile hear me listening for the voices to fade away.

The tiles hear my sigh of relief when I'm finally alone when the wood door swings closed with a dull thud. But that doesn't make it all better. I still don't want to be here. I don't know how to be here. I'm not supposed to be here. I can't be caught here. To be seen here is to be invisible. I have to come out of here before someone sees. I have to come out.

I push out of the stall to wash my hands. I look down as the water pours over me. Hands, shaking. I chance a glance in the dirty mirror. I don't see myself. I only see the tiles, pressing in from all sides. I see pink, loud and everywhere. I can only just see a glimmer, fading even as I catch it. The faintest outline of a person I recognize blinking in and out of view. Raising a clammy hand against the mirror, I draw a line down its face. It shines fiercely for a second, then vanishes entirely.

I know I'm uncomfortable in the women's bathroom; I don't know what that means. I turn to my trusted friend, the search engine:

Genderfluid; trans nonbinary; FTM transition; FTM health risks; transgender law; transgender Florida; Florida transgender murder; Florida murder trans woman of color

I slam the laptop shut. Is it wrong if I don't want to be trans? I'd say it's unfair, but there's a lot of other things that are more unfair. I just don't want to have to do all this again. It's been five years since I realized I was bi and two years since Irma. I can't handle a disaster right now. We're just barely clear of hurricane season. I have a lot of writing to do. My writing calls me to remember. The pain begs me to forget.

At this point, I hardly remember the agony of coming out to myself the first time. I have no way of knowing what I will uncover. I pushed it down so I could breathe. I don't remember the sleepless nights, fearing to blink and invite the future. I don't have to remember. I was sure of who I am, but identity is hardly stable (Wagner et al., 2016). Now I blame myself for how hard the memories hit me when I'm suddenly faced with the same fears. Maybe I would feel differently now or have some helpful insight if I hadn't blocked it out.

But here I am, sequestered in my first adult apartment. Some melodramatic indie song playing on repeat, I stuff my earbuds into my ears to block out the sound of my gasping. I don't feel the soft mattress underneath me. A tightness stretches across my bones, locking me in a desperate fetal position like I'm trying to curl into oblivion. I don't want to go to sleep. I don't want to be awake. I don't want to spend a single second longer trying to reconcile how much I want to love myself with how much I hate the disruption this will cause. I don't want to tear up everyone's lives. I can't afford to survive this right now. Still, the knowledge that this is happening, if not now then soon, strangles me. I am trans and I have to do something about it. Even if that something is not medical, it's going to take a whole lot of therapy, wardrobe shopping, explaining, re-explaining, apologizing, doubting, fearing, and loving. I look up at the ceiling, fuzzy around the edges of darkness.

I'm creeping towards creating a disaster of my own. Blue creeps in at the corner of my vision, refusing to let me forget. Coming out will drown me. I have no way of knowing what will pull me under, or who. Telling the world I'm trans will wash away everything in my path. I'll burst into their lives an unknown entity, demanding their attention. How will they survive me? I didn't think a hurricane would feel like family.

This house could collapse around me. The ceiling looks sturdy, small cracks aside. But who knows what world I'll wake up into, what pieces of my life will be strewn around me. I find myself in a pool of water, tears collecting around my ears. Are these the rising waters I was raised to fear? I didn't prepare well enough, I realize, self-doubt rising to a cacophony. I shouldn't have forgotten. I've been here before. Fighting to even out my ragged breathing, I exhale deeply and freeze. The waves of concern roll through my body as it begs me to inhale. I delay as long as I can, holding my breath as I dive into these old fears, long forgotten. What does it cost to remember? Would that have made this waiting game more normal?

Being on the edge of destruction with my queerness is not homeostasis. It does not slow my heartbeat or calm my breathing. It makes me grind my teeth together and lie awake at night bracing for tomorrow. My body is steeped in ambiguity it cannot resolve. I cannot acclimate to my queerness because it is a constant disruption of a tidy march to my grave. There is no stability, standing on this edge. Either I move off into the comfortable fold or step forward, into identity freefall.

I know this feeling. As I blink through tears, pictures from the past flash in front of me. I feel the smooth duvet of my childhood bed instead of my cotton one. Lying awake for another night of stealthy queer research, I see my young arms outstretched. Please, my younger self begs, desperate for someone to take me away from this place. Surely, I don't belong here, being who I

am. Trying to outrace dawn, I counted down the hours until I was due back in class. No one came to take me away. The future crept up on me, an unwelcome reminder of how I dreamed to oblivate the present.

Now I'm lying awake again, questioning who I am again, knowing I'm about to change my whole life again. I wish there was a hurricane to focus all my anxiety. At least people would understand that and feel that, too. I remember how to survive that. I will buy water; I will buy canned food; I will buy batteries. Please, let me survive that. I don't know how to make wishing for a hurricane good. I know it's wrong and twisted. But without it, I have to deal with the overwhelming truth of the present as I realize there will, indeed, be a future. Moreover, I have to find a place in it.

I'm never free of this uncertainty, fear, and doubt. Queer life doesn't fall neatly into place by coming out. The uncertainty before coming out is always there, just muted. The disruption of queerness doesn't go away. It's not something far off or possible; it is continual. Just because it isn't constantly full-fledged doesn't mean it isn't still there, a softer vibration passing unnoticed. The queerness of the present is also the future, coming back to warn me. It's the promise that this will happen again.

It's easier not to remember. It's easier to pretend queerness is a temporary thing, trotted out at pride and reinforced through coming out. It's less painful to let the most tangible marker of my difference fade into the background. It's nice to have that privilege, to play at normal. My queerness doesn't let me forget. My queerness is habitual, it rocks my life over and over like a hurricane barreling down on my town. I can't predict it; I can't outrun it. Queerness is as much my home as Florida is, deep down. I don't want to move away and leave it behind. Sometimes I have to leave, forget it for my own safety. But I know I will always return.

Even though it's not on the front of my mind, the disruption of hurricanes and queerness always mark my life. The uneasy anticipation of the two lies at the horizon of the unconscious, daring me to forget. Forgetting is not an option; I would not survive it. Still, I need to be careful when I dip into those memories. It hurts too much to bathe in them. I look out over the ocean of now, letting these memories run into it as I learn to swim.

Waiting to understand. I wish I could tell you knowing all this meant I know who I am. I wish I could remember more than the pain of this moment. It's a moment that spans space and time, but the same moment at its core:

It's knowing that tomorrow won't be the same as today because you aren't the same today as who you were yesterday. This is reassuring and terrifying in equal measure.

It's realizing that daring to be someone different tomorrow could ruin you just as it gives you hope today. This is terror, the rightful cause of many anxieties.

It's understanding that others, years from now, may not know who I was when I was born. This is both comforting and deeply sad. I start to grieve someone I never knew how to be.

It's the pain of a body that makes so much possible but traps me in so much misery. This isn't so much a rant against my body as it is a prayer that it feels different one day.

It's deeply ingrained inadequacies, stemming not so much from my own self-doubt but a recognition of my own limits. This is not as infuriating as it is humbling.

It's the fear of becoming something radically different and still being unhappy. This is my worst nightmare; that I become the monster at the end of my own book.

It's a reluctantly blossoming hope that this may be the place to begin. This is not a mandate to transform but a gentle nudge that it may be alright to be a disaster.

I wish I could tell you who I am, after so much remembering. I wish these faded memories could connect to something more meaningful. It's just still too close, knocking at the corner of my vision, demanding my attention. I wish I could just look at it, head-on, and confront it once and for all. I wish I could put a name to it, nail it down, make it relatable. But it's a queer moment. And if I could see it clearly, it wouldn't be.

Invoking Queer Ecological Temporality

My experience of queer temporality is one of breaking and remaking. In realizing my bisexual identity, I identified with the ways my future may look different than the one I imagined under my assumed heterosexuality. As in Edelman's (2004) queer presentism, the change in my identity in the present has disrupted my possibilities of a normative future. My embodied identity shifts in relation to my position in time and space. This is only interesting after-the-fact; at the time, it was a matter of life or death.

In my experience of Hurricane Irma, I felt a profound sense of precarity that I have the racial and class privilege to ignore most of the time. Rather than rest on material reassurances like my ready supplies of water and food, I found a way back to understanding my body's vulnerability as a queer subject. I rehearsed relationality with Hurricane Irma by attuning to her nonverbal communication—the wind, water, and other elements she swept up in her path. Recalling that moment, the struggle to survive climate disasters of hurricanes and climate change is ongoing.

My queer experiences also occurred as a cycle. I came back to having to come out, even after I lived comfortably with my bisexual identity. The cyclical experience of my queer identity recalls ecological temporality, evoking nature's trend toward ecological repetition (Doyle, 2016). When my queer temporality conjures both memories and embodied re-experiences of the past,

the distinctions between past, present, and future blur. My experience in the second round of coming to and coming out with queer identity may have been less disruptive if I had carried the lessons from the first time with me. I neglected the ongoing identity work of queerness and survival. Coming back to it, I may have felt less alone and desperate knowing I had been there before.

My experiences of queer temporality as cyclical and remaking the future suggest new understandings of climate disaster. Rather than sequester my practical knowledge of hurricanes to one part of the year, queer ecological temporality calls me to live with that disruption every day. This speaks to Haraway's (2016) call to "stay with the trouble" (p. 1). Remembering the precarity I face from climate disasters like hurricanes would remind me of the daily vulnerability other communities face. In this way, queer ecological temporality is also a project in solidarity and empathy (Seymour, 2013). Queer ecological temporality imagines climate disaster differently. It marks the ways natural disasters are not merely one-off incidents to withstand. Rather, hurricanes would offer an opportunity to think through the future of climate disaster more broadly. To adapt to climate change, we need to understand ecological temporality's more-than-human epochs of time (Rush, 2018; Shotwell, 2016). Queer ecological temporality reminds us that climate disaster is too big a challenge to put off for later. Climate disaster calls us to reform our human-nature relationships and understand the impact of the present on an alleged future. We can't wait out a hurricane and get back to normal. We don't have the time.

Conclusion: Queerness and Climate Disasters

Coming to the end of this project, I am grateful for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of hurricanes and struck with the overwhelming sense of work left unfinished. To close my discussion of climate disasters and human-nature relationships, I summarize the sub-arguments of my two analysis chapters and connect them to my overall research question. Then, I consider contributions, ethical implications, and possible limitations of this work. Finally, I discuss possible future projects extending my project. Understanding climate disaster is a complex project relationally and corporeally.

Queering Body, Space, and Time

By using *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) as a popular cli-fi example of reimagined human-nature relationships, I argued for the necessity of a queer transformation of the nature-culture binary. Performing ecocritical textual analysis of this film suggested bodies with more porous and intertwined corporeal boundaries survived and thrived in a world riddled by climate disaster. *Waterworld's* near-endless oceans represents a future of climate disaster—one where clinging to a past ruled by fire and oil spells destruction. Here, climate disaster is a large-scale, catastrophic reordering of life and limb. The changing relationships of bodies and space pull me forward to a time just barely out of the realm of my imagination.

In a more immediate sense, I reflected on my experiences of Hurricane Irma as a climate disaster. When my daily life of comfort and privilege is disrupted by an impending disaster, I found a way back to my repeated experiences of precarity as a queer subject. My relationship to time itself changed, facing the storm. Waiting for Irma to make landfall, I realized all too

personally that I had been in this situation before. Anticipating hurricanes is routine for me as a Florida resident. I also experienced such fear and vulnerability as I repeatedly came to terms with my queer identity. Writing in the intersections of these two categories of experience and identity, I offered queer ecological temporality as a way of reconceptualizing the challenges of climate disasters.

My ecocritical and autoethnographic work in these chapters serves a larger purpose—transforming how I understand the hurricane in terms of body, space, and time. By creating a mutant hero who embraces his reliance on water, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) suggests that transcorporeal bodies and queered nature-culture binaries thrive in a future of climate disaster. This reformation of the human body and its active relationship with nature-as-space calls me to reconsider my carefully kept distance from floodwaters and wild winds. That is not to say that I need to open my doors and windows during a hurricane, however. Rather, my fear and struggle to withstand hurricanes changes when I consider the ways in which my body is already shaped by the elements. Climate disaster is not external to me. I am entangled with it through my complicity in systems of consumption and production just as my life is swept up in hurricane season. Nature, the elemental world, or space shapes my body even as I prepare to outlast the storm. I cannot understand myself or my relationships with other humans until I understand my relationship with nature.

My relationship with nature becomes highly personal and tangible in my autoethnography of queer ecological temporality. By thinking thematically across two areas of lived experience, I found connections between my understanding of time during hurricanes and formative queer moments. My body surviving hurricanes is shaped by my memories of coming to my queerness. Repeated experiences of elemental and social survival shape my body's

position in space. Under queer ecological temporality, my body remembers both past and future climate disasters rather than viewing hurricanes as a one-off disaster to withstand. From this perspective, my relationship with hurricanes and the cycles of nature must change. The precarity of anticipating hurricanes is not confined to a single season in the late summer and early fall. Hurricanes just make the omnipresent threats of climate disaster most clear. I need to live with this realization and actively take time to contemplate how I may further change my relationship to my body and its position in the world.

As I prepare for a hurricane, I am preparing for a future of climate disaster. I view a hurricane as a tangible manifestation of the vast, inoperable temporality of climate change (Doyle, 2016; Jay et al., 2018). As hurricanes adapt, so must I (Kang & Elsner, 2015). Hurricanes are not merely storms. They are a challenge to ontologies of purity and isolation. They are an opportunity to transform my relationship with nature before I am fully submerged in the chaos of rising seas. Hurricanes are not just disasters—they are lessons from the past and glimpses of climate futures. Queering human-nature relationships, my body is porous. Upsetting ontological purity, nature is active and even solid elements like land are fluid. Thinking about my body's uneasy and contested survival in a rapidly changing world, my concerns of survival in the future are a fight to survive today. I cannot survive without understanding climate disaster differently.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

My work with climate disasters offers three main theoretical contributions to communication research—challenging the discipline's nature-culture binary, extending applications of queer theory, and theorizing queer ecological temporality. Situating this project within the communication discipline is a complex task. First, it works at the intersections of

critical cultural communication and environmental communication. Such work is not unusual in ecocriticism, a transdisciplinary method of inquiry incorporating these two perspectives. Joining this conversation, I contribute to transformation and relational ontologies situated within and beyond the communication field.

This project also imagines applications of queer theory beyond queer identities. Like Freccero's (2017) application of queerness to nature, I read queerness in the Mariner's mutant body and the experience of hurricanes. Like Freccero, I work to find a balance between relying solely on the labor of queer-identified bodies and abstracting theory too far and disregarding queer experience. To this end, my work theorizing queer ecological temporality draws from my queer lived experiences and contributes to a literature of autoethnographies of coming out. At the same time, I see my work expanding opportunities for scholars to engage with queer theory. When queer theory can be applied beyond exclusively research of sexuality and gender, the communities that mean so much to me can be more widely represented within academic knowledge.

Queer ecological temporality is my work's most specific theoretical contribution. Building on theories of queer temporality, ecological temporality, and queer ecology, I offer queer ecological temporality to queer and environmental theorists. In my review, the closest theoretical relation to my theory is Seymour's (2013) queer ecological imagination. With its inspiration drawing from a queer futurist temporality, queer ecological imagination falls closer to queer futurity than my engagement with queer presentism. My queer ecological temporality rejects the argument that sustainability and climate change adaptation are future concerns. For so many, climate disaster is a present concern (Rush, 2018). To stress the urgency of immediate response to climate disaster, queer ecological temporality helps solve the challenges of

understanding ecological temporality. Climate disasters are both the broad threat of changing climates and the tangible threats of ‘natural’ disasters like hurricanes. Accordingly, we need a queer ecological theory to respond to the complex temporal challenges of climate change.

My final contribution in this project is methodological. Concerned with preserving others’ right to privacy in autoethnography, I animate nonhuman aspects of my story’s environment to evoke feelings I originally felt in human interpersonal relationships. By centering my feelings about my queerness on details of my material settings, I represent my experiences of queer identity in our sociocultural and political world without implicating others who are not contributors to the research process of autoethnography. This strategy works especially well in masking those whose relational identities would make traditional masking difficult, like close family or friends. I offer this methodological approach to autoethnographies and other scholars writing reflexively who wish to represent their own relational identities while minimizing risk to others. Recognizing nature’s subjectivity is one approach to equalizing human-nature relationships (Alaimo, 2016; Seymour, 2013). In this way, my methodological contribution works in solidarity with both human and nonhuman subjectivities.

Ethical Implications

Like all research, my work is entangled in complex webs of political and epistemological power. Accordingly, this project in queering climate disasters carries affective and theoretical implications. As readers engage with my project, I struggle to imagine their response. It is possible those who have lived similar experiences may feel a strong negative response, re-experiencing their past. Thinking about my project’s reception, I worry that my stories of surviving hurricanes may fail to accurately encompass the very real danger such storms pose. As I noted in the story, I was never directly in physical danger. A story delving into the

various inconveniences and anxieties of hurricanes feels almost hollow compared to other storm autoethnographies which center the loss of life all-too-often felt during hurricane season (Johnson, 2018). It is difficult, as a writer, to reflect on the stories I have shared and reconcile my narrative and the privileged position it represents. Throughout, I noted how my markers of privilege like economic class shaped my experience of Hurricane Irma. I take hurricanes as seriously as I can and resist valorizing the storms which inflict so much damage and destruction.

In a similar sense, my stories of queer experience are not serious enough, either. Coming out as bisexual and transgender have not (as of yet) precipitated any direct violence or discrimination towards me. I worry sharing these stories paints an inaccurately sunny picture of life as queer. There are, of course, many euphoric points to queer life. It is important to note that coming to terms with queer identity and coming out to others are tragically not often among them. Still, these are my stories, and I do with them what I can. Even as I articulate the valuable lessons of queer temporality gleaned from queer experience, I refuse to ignore the very real consequences these marginalized embodiments sadly incur. Honoring these experiences, my move to embrace climate disaster is not a matter of celebrating forces of destruction. Rather, if such destruction and disruption are inevitable parts of surviving our changing climate, I use queer theory to respond to them differently.

Noting these two implications of my autoethnography, I consider possible ethical consequences of my larger theoretical argument of queering nature. I am concerned by aligning queerness with the Mariner in *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) and the disruption of climate disaster. The Mariner, as I expressed in my analysis, is a flawed character in a flawed film. Even though he gets a redemption arc, he is violent and abusive toward his fellow travelers. Lauding this character as a champion for ontological queerness is not a comfortable argument. I respond

by asserting I am not making a direct equivocation. The Mariner is not queer-identified, and his interpersonal actions are not queer, either. His porous, mutated body is queer. His way of living outside of confined social communities and close relationship with water are queer.

Ontologically, the nomadic mutant Mariner can be queer in ways the violent white masculine Mariner is not.

Arguing that a queer approach to climate disaster helps me reimagine the nature-culture binary and ecological temporality is theoretically sound but practically fraught. Aligning a hurricane with queerness is problematic like aligning the Mariner with queerness—hurricanes are deadly. An alliance between queerness and a force of nature, even a destructive one, resists the move to classify queerness as unnatural or against nature (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson, 2010). At the same time, invoking a queer metaphor for hurricanes may seem to suggest queerness is also dangerous. As I operate, in my argument, from a point of climate disaster being queered, queerness is never directly interchangeable with destruction. That is to say, the destruction is the primary effect of climate disaster, while a queer reading is secondary. In all, I feel ethically comfortable with this argument as I work to reclaim the disruption of climate disaster. If hurricanes are inevitable, changing our response to them theoretically and pragmatically is only wise. Queering our response, perhaps, is even better.

Limitations

Considering my work thus far, I note potential textual limitations. As a matter of study scope, my project only engages two perspectives of climate disasters—*Waterworld's* (Reynolds, 1995) and my own autoethnographic re-telling. While drawing from these two texts provide popular and personal representations, additional texts from political or organizational contexts would provide further complexity. Further, my choice of cli-fi film, *Waterworld*, is canonical

rather than contemporary. While choosing this older piece of popular culture has its benefits, as I discussed, I also wonder what modern film representations of climate disaster might add to this research. Additional texts, like cli-fi films or sociopolitical communication, would make this study more well-rounded.

Within personal accounts of climate disaster, experiences may vary widely based on positionality, location, and year. Recalling the inextricability of racism to Tuana's (2007) work on Hurricane Katrina, I worry my work does not de-center whiteness. As noted by Johnson (2001), queer studies is often white-dominant, failing to address its own marginalization of people of color and their intersectional perspectives. This concern is echoed by Storr (1997/2017), who argued queer theory has failed to "encompass racial dynamics at the heart of sexuality" (p. 58). My work does not contribute to the intersectional approach Johnson called *quare studies*. One partial justification for this involves the limits of my own experience. I reflected on my positionality as a white, middle-class queer scholar and the privileges it yielded during Hurricane Irma. Taking stock of my own investments in the systems which are written to exclude others is essential. I invite further research from other voices to create a more nuanced and critical conversation about the ways in which hurricanes expose social investments in the nature-culture binary and associated systems of oppression.

Recommendations for Further Research

Understanding the contributions and limitations of my work here, I offer possible future directions to extend my research. Ecocritical textual analysis and autoethnography are two valuable methods for environmental communication. Further research could continue analyzing cli-fi films and do a comparative reading of a canonical film like *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995) and more modern releases. Additional autoethnographies of hurricanes and other climate

disasters are also needed. Where my narrative provides one perspective, a collaborative autoethnography could encompass more. However, I see the greatest potential in expanding this research to other methodologies entirely.

My explication of queer ecological temporality comes from personal experience. While a valuable theory for my own sensemaking, such an idea could not be widely generalizable unless it is represented by others' understanding of ecological temporality. Accordingly, I see my theorizing here like a pilot case study, helping steer me to future research. To broaden the scope of queer ecological temporality, research could interview affected communities about their experiences of temporality during hurricanes. This type of work would contribute to research on public understandings of temporality in conservation efforts (Roh et al., 2016). This type of research would encourage a multiplicity of voices and diversify academic knowledge.

Climate disaster should also be studied from an official or professional communication context. For example, researchers could analyze reporting from a national organization like NOAA or a local news channel. In particular, it would be insightful to mark uses of timing phrases or predictions. Emphasizing the need to predict and track hurricanes could demonstrate the affective response to make sense and create order out of elemental chaos. Queer theoretical tenets of disruption and ambiguity (Halberstam, 2005) could materialize in representations of storms as disruptive and hard to categorize. Analyzing these texts addresses public communication and an additional source of hurricane communication.

These recommendations for new methodological and thematic directions of this climate disaster research encourage a multiplicity of perspectives and metatheoretical orientations. Climate disaster is a complex and dynamic problem, one requiring a myriad of possible solutions. For my part, I offer queer ecological temporality and queered human-nature

relationships. When we understand ourselves differently, we understand our place in the world differently. We might begin to understand that climate disaster is not a question of *if*; it is not even a question of *when*. Climate disaster and its impacts on sociopolitical life is a matter of *how*. How we adapt to meet the challenges and how we change our perspective on human-nature survival matters now more than ever.

Remembering Climate Futures

I chose this research topic thinking I knew something about hurricanes. I thought their relentless resurgence in my life was a neat matter of cyclical disruption. I thought a queer answer to the question of climate disaster would be enough. After analyzing queered human-nature relationships in a flooded post-apocalyptic world and remembering my own experiences with elemental precarity, I know it takes a queer, ecocritical understanding of nature, and more.

As I write, I can feel the water lapping at my feet. It bobs around my toes lazily, meeting my skin just enough to reassure me it's still there. Without having to think too hard, I remember the other times. The times when the water rises, angry, swallowing the shoreline and splashing over the pier. Above, the rain pours down, splashing against the wooden planks. The two meet at last, dancing until one is indistinguishable from the other. Their embrace is secret, lost on the people like me who have long since fled for higher ground. Even long after the waves recede and the clouds regain control of their water, the salt etched into the water-logged wood tells their story. I enter at the end of it, just barely making it into the narrative. But the storm is not over, just shifted out of view. There is another storm, down the coast, herding locals to shelter.

I grieve the storms I have forgotten and the memories I neglected to nurture. Most of the lessons from hurricanes past are lost on me as I turn away from the pier and the salty beach and humid air. It is easy to live this way, refusing to swallow the many truths which try to choke me.

I don't want to change. My life is fine as it is, as long as there isn't a hurricane coming. And as I lived, I forgot. As I write, I remember. As I write, I realize forgetting was never really an option. The memories will surface year after year, washing up on the shore no matter how hard I throw them out to sea.

I am living with hurricanes every day as I am queer every day. Sometimes it is a background thought and sometimes it shines in my face, blinding me to all else. I am lucky. I am privileged. I am gifted to be able to forget. I am not staring down a storm every day. I can mutate in and out of precarity. My whiteness, my middle-class-ness, and academic-ness give me that much. I can see the storm when I want to and leave it when I do not. Sometimes I need this ability to find joy, not worry about what disaster lurks just offshore. Living only by forgetting, though, is just not an option.

I know this life will not last forever. Climate change, popping up in politics and annual debates of whether hurricanes are actually stronger or news channels just like to catastrophize, looms large. I'm afraid of remembering too late, realizing climate disaster has always walked within me just as the seas pull me under. I don't want to learn to swim too late. I may not be able to evolve to breathe water or shape shift to hide my queerness, but I can still change my body in space. My body is fluid, blending and melding the best it can given its environment. My body is the environment, just a portion of it I can somewhat control. Just as my body is not external to what we call the environment, my queerness is not entirely internal to me. I am queer, in this academic southern American space and in this precarious political election year of 2020. You and I, together, are living in queer times. We're going to need more queerness to survive them.

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