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THE RHETORIC OF CAMP:  
ADAM LAMBERT'S IDENTIFICATION AND DIVISION STRATEGIES IN HIS *AMERICAN*  
*IDOL* PERFORMANCES

by

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H.B.A., University of Toronto, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric  
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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes camp style as a rhetorical strategy for Burkean rhetorical identification. Through a case study of Adam Lambert's use of this style on *American Idol* in 2009, this study produced a rhetorical theory of camp that challenges the typically dialectical relationship between identification and its opposite: division. This study responds both to Susan Sontag's seminal essay on camp style and to other conversations surrounding identification, which revolve around how rhetors avoid division (Borrowman and Kmetz; Jones and Rowland), how rhetors appeal to conflicting audiences (DeGenaro; Helmbrecht and Love), how rhetors create new narratives as a means of identification (Wilz; Stob; DeGenaro; Jones and Rowland), how rhetors might use identification for a greater good (Stob; Wilz), and how rhetors achieve partial consubstantiality (Fernheimer). It analyzes how camp can be used in this way via Adam Lambert's performances on *American Idol* in two different rhetorical situations—his performances for America's votes at the end of the competition, and his performance with *KISS* during the Season Eight finale after his fate had already been determined. These performances were cross-referenced with Lambert's similar performances on and off the show, as well as with numerical data about the show's viewership. Ultimately, this study found that camp style can be used to identify with conflicting audiences and be used to gain rhetorical agency, and that division can be a means of identification, or even an intentional rhetorical strategy. In Lambert's case, although division is what allowed him to stand out from his *American Idol* competitors, he had to do so carefully in order to also appeal to the show's producers and audience.

This thesis is dedicated to Peter. You have seen me through every stage of this project and learned more about camp than either of us probably ever imagined. You're a trooper, and I could not have done this project without you by my side. I love you! And for my puppy, Odin. Getting you in my last semester of my thesis made the back half of this project a nightmare, but you're adorable so I forgive you.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When he competed on the eighth season of *FOX's American Idol* in 2009, Adam Lambert made it to the final round of the competition. The performer stood out for his glam rock vocals and campy aesthetics. As the *Las Vegas Review – Journal* explains: “for a show whose contestants often pack all the spark of a pack of wet matches, Lambert’s a lightning rod” (Bracelin). However, the stylistic choices that Lambert made in order to stand out became a point of contention during the season. As LGBT+ publication *New Now Next*’s David Opie suggests, “seeing [Lambert] resist the cookie cutter mold that labels usually impose on reality show contestants was a cause for celebration early on, but not everyone appreciated the overt queerness of his image.” This “queerness” has limited his career both with the show’s fans and amongst the people that stigmatizes *American Idol* performers (Opie). Lambert’s camp style tended to either draw people in or push them away. Specifically, while he was still on *American Idol* Lambert had his loyal “Glamberts” who loved him for his campiness. But at the same time, the media conversation surrounding the performer’s style was at the center of speculation about his sexuality before he publicly came out as gay (Draper). Post-*Idol*, this has been different both in terms of Lambert’s career and how LGBT+ performers are discussed in the media. In the decade since his time on the show, Lambert has become the front man for the legendary rock band, *Queen*, and been praised for his campy performance persona. As *Queen* drummer Roger Taylor said of Lambert, “I describe him as almost a *camp* Elvis (Presley). [...] He’s an extraordinary singer and a real talent. I feel he fits into our sort of theatricality” (Graff [emphasis added]). Lambert’s exaggerated, theatrical style has helped him make a name for himself in the popular imagination. However, when we talk about Lambert’s style as “campy,” that term is still fairly broad. Further, the way that Lambert uses camp

style is unusual because he is appealing both to his specific fanbase, but also to the pop music industry on *American Idol* and beyond.

Theorists have been working to understand what it means to be “campy” for over fifty years. Beginning with Susan Sontag’s 1964 essay, “Notes on Camp,” the debate surrounding this exaggerated style has not yet been settled, nor has camp ever even had an agreed-upon definition. Sontag lists many “notes” that indicate what camp might encapsulate, but her broad definition is that “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (2). This term could mean many things, but throughout her essay Sontag often connects it to theatrical performances, as well as the LGBT+ community (12). As a result, Lambert’s use of camp style on *American Idol* as a man who was not publicly out as gay was a bold choice in 2009. Yet, Lambert managed to get to the end of the competition and have a successful career fronting a glam rock band. In order to understand how and why this might even be possible, we need to understand how he uses camp as an identification strategy.

When we talk about “identification,” we need to look at Kenneth Burke’s *A Rhetoric of Motives* as a starting point. Burke theorizes identification—or consubstantiality—in terms of a rhetor finding common ground with his or her audience (21). This is initially a simple idea, but when scholars have analyzed identification they have found that it is far more intricate, particularly when it comes to how identification works with its opposite: division. This tends to be a fairly binary relationship between identification and division, while this study will show that there are more dimensions to this relationship.

One of the main arguments in terms of identification centers on how rhetors navigate conflict or division, particularly when it comes to political rhetoric (Borrowman and Kmetz; Jones and Rowland). While Borrowman and Kmetz have analyzed how in a political setting a rhetor

could “invoke identification as well as division” and “align when necessary and divide when required,” depending on the issue that they are addressing (277), Jones and Rowland argue that in a similar setting a rhetor can emphasize identification in order to minimize division, effectively re-writing a narrative to bring two opposing political sides together (79).

Another element of this discussion that complicates identification is when a rhetor is dealing with two conflicting audiences simultaneously. DeGenaro found that when it comes to working-class populations, part of that conflict comes from the fact that these populations often are conflicted in and of themselves, so rhetors from those communities hold two different social identities that they need to resolve (386). Meanwhile, Helmbrecht and Love analyze how rhetors trying to identify with their audiences might have to find a middle ground between two different audiences in order to attract both without driving another away (154). All of these authors argued that rhetorical identification and division are interconnected, but the rhetor needs to understand their own conflicting positions and that of their audience in order to be effective communicators.

Another complication that scholars have found with identification is the kind of re-writing it can sometimes involve, which can include changing a previous narrative or creating something entirely new (Wilz; Stob; DeGenaro; Jones and Rowland). As Wilz argues, sometimes the rhetor might have to point opposing sides to a common enemy (583). Meanwhile, Stob focuses on how rhetors often have to rewrite narratives and identities for this purpose (236). This is important because, as DeGenaro argues, sometimes identity is tenuous and needs to be constantly be “constructed” or written (395). This sense of identity can also be altered quite drastically. As Jones and Rowland argue, a rhetor can emphasize a shared identity with his or her audience in order to “transcend conflict” or division (82).

However, the goal of rhetorical identification often goes beyond purely finding common ground. Stob makes the argument that Burkean rhetoric is centered on “amelioration.” That is, consubstantiality can and should be working towards bettering society, which Stob argues is what Burke was actually arguing (245). In a similar vein, Wilz argues that identification is a means of resolving conflict (605).

We can also turn to Janice W. Fernheimer’s discussions on consubstantiality, particularly when it comes to rhetors making smaller steps to becoming fully consubstantial with their audiences, rather than fully persuading them to act. As she explains, rhetors who do not have a strong position can make moves towards “interruptive invention,” or partial steps on the way to full consubstantiality. These moments then open up further “inventional opportunities” for the rhetor to win over his or her audience (17). Another facet of this is the rhetor’s identity in and of itself. Fernheimer suggests that a rhetor can “dissociate” his or her identities—meaning that they can reprioritize and emphasize one identity over another—in order to suit his or her audience (114).

While these authors have found that identification and division are sometimes closely related, and that consubstantiality often requires smaller steps in between, there is still more to examine in terms of how a rhetor might identify with two fundamentally opposing audiences at the same time. Rather than re-writing or re-imagining these spaces, it might be possible for a rhetor to exist in the liminal space between division and identification, and intentionally create these conflicting identifications. Further, they might use division as a rhetorical strategy in itself, rather than identification. In order to examine how this might be possible, we need to look at a strategy that has been used in this way: camp. Further, we need to look at how camp style is an important identification strategy for navigating a constrained rhetorical context that constantly tries to reframe camp style in its own way. This study examined how Adam Lambert’s camp style on

*American Idol* challenged not only the norms of the competition and its typical audience, but also how identification and division might coexist. This analysis asked and answered the following questions:

- What strategies does Lambert use to identify with his campy audience?
- What strategies does Lambert use to identify with the *American Idol* audience?
- What is the relationship between these strategies in his performances?
- What is the result of Lambert's identification with these two audiences?

Ultimately, this study found that camp style can challenge the dialectic relationship between identification and division, and it can be used to identify with two fundamentally conflicting audiences, both simultaneously and separately. I argue that in Lambert's case, division is what allowed him to stand out from his *American Idol* competitors, but he had to use this strategy carefully in order to also appeal to the show's mainstream demographic: the *Idol* voting audience. He worked within a limited space for agency, but reworked the narrative imposed on him. Through a case study of Lambert's style on this particular platform, this study produced a rhetorical theory of camp that explains this phenomenon, and that challenges the typically dialectical relationship between identification and division.

This study will present a close case study Lambert's time on the 2009 eighth season of *FOX's American Idol*. Lambert openly discusses his use of camp throughout his career, but in a time when camp was not yet a part of mainstream popular culture, he had to negotiate his own place as a unique—campy—singer in a highly produced and constrained setting. *American Idol* was designed to produce stars with recording contracts. The show aired on *FOX*, a large network, and was often filled with advertisements for *Ford Motors*. Meanwhile, Lambert came from a 'wild child' theater background, attending *Burning Man* and performing at the underground show, *The*



*Zodiac Show* (Grioriadis). This clash of worlds came to a head in the two-part finale of the show, wherein he had two main rhetorical exigencies: first, to gain America's votes when he competed against the much more mainstream, straight, Christian Kris Allen; second, once the votes were already cast and he was awaiting the results, he worked to be remembered post-*Idol* in his very theatrical performance with *KISS*. Lambert not only had the finale of the show to consider, but he also had to navigate the media that was trying to out him as gay in the latter part of the competition, and his camp style was taken as a sign of his sexuality (Draper). These two particular episodes of the eighth season of *American Idol* present us with a concentrated version of the kinds of rhetorical moves that Lambert throughout the season, as well as they most closely show the contrast between his two most high-stakes motives. When he was competing for America's votes at the end of the competition, he had the chance of becoming the next "American Idol." Meanwhile, his performance in the final episode was his last chance to use the *American Idol* platform to bolster his career.

I will be focusing on Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* for the majority of my analysis, but I will draw on the aforementioned discussions centering on rhetorical identification. I will also expand upon Burke's concept of identification with Janice W. Fernheimer's *Stepping Into Zion* to further explain consubstantiality. This will allow me to focus on Lambert's exigencies, and also the rhetorical strategies he uses in order to simultaneously identify with fundamentally conflicting audiences.

This chapter introduced the theoretical context for this study, as well as an overview of the study's aims. The next chapter will discuss the context of Lambert's campiness on *American Idol*—from the show itself, to questions of agency, to camp theory and history. Chapter three will then focus on explaining how identification will be used as a framework for my analysis. Chapter

four will outline the methods for this study. The fifth and sixth chapters will analyze Adam Lambert's *American Idol* performances. More specifically, the fifth chapter will analyze his performances in the episode "Top 2 Perform," in which Lambert was competing against Kris Allen for America's votes. Meanwhile, the sixth chapter will focus on his performance with *KISS* in the episode "Season 8 Finale," wherein the winner of the competition was announced. Finally, the seventh chapter will synthesize the study's findings and develop a rhetorical theory that explains how camp can be used as a rhetorical identification strategy in a highly constrained environment, which can then be applied to other studies in the future.

## CHAPTER TWO: SETTING THE STAGE FOR ADAM LAMBERT

In order to proceed with this case study, we first need to understand the full context surrounding Adam Lambert's camp style on *American Idol*. This presents us with a complex rhetorical situation that involves a number of moving parts. This chapter will outline all of the components that needed to line up in order that Lambert's campiness could be used rhetorically in the ways it was. His performances and his style occurred at a cultural turning point in camp style and *American Idol*. Although I am not arguing that he is the cause of either of these shifts, or even that *American Idol* was solely responsible for the way it changed after Lambert's season, I am arguing that his camp style could not have had any of the same impact before or after that moment in time and culture than it did during the show's eighth season. Camp as a rhetorical strategy for identification existed in a unique way when Lambert used it on *American Idol*.

I will examine this context in terms of both camp style and *American Idol* culture. I will first outline how the show works to produce pop stars, both in terms of how Lambert used this to his advantage and the show used him and his camp in order to attract more viewers. This will be important in terms of calling into question Lambert's agency, as well as how we worked within the show's constraints. Next, I will explain the gay photo scandal that happened while Lambert was on the show in terms of how his campiness and the style's long history were used against him. I will then discuss the turning point in camp style both on and off of *American Idol* in order to explain Lambert's role and position in that turning point. Throughout these sections, I will take time to explain camp style in more detail, both from a historical and a theoretical perspective.

### A Cog in the Machine

FOX's *American Idol* is both a talent competition and a pop star producing machine. As much as the contestants are striving to gain popularity fast and sign a recording contract, the show

also wants to keep viewers watching. The show is also the one that gives out these contracts to each season's winner, so they need to make sure that the person who makes it to the end of the competition is marketable. So, when a contestant like Adam Lambert not only got onto the show and made it far, but also used camp style to do so, we need to understand how the *American Idol* machine really works. That is, we need to understand how the show used Lambert as a marketing tool and shaped him to be the performer he is now, as well as how Lambert used the show to his advantage—even when it seemed like the odds were stacked against him.

The biggest mark against Lambert was the Season Eight voting. Back in 2009, *American Idol* actually took up much of the prime-time television audience. While previous seasons of the show had had lower ratings for FOX, during the show's eighth season the network had “captured the ratings crown for the aforementioned 18 to 49 demographic (despite a 16 percent decline from last year's numbers). Their success was bolstered by the continued success of their *American Idol* juggernaut, which ended the season occupying the top two slots for highest rated shows,” with each part of the finale having around 26 million views (Graham). While this could be attributed to the media speculation surrounding Lambert's sexuality during the show (Draper 205), these claims cannot be completely quantified or proven. The most we can look to is how much the show was being discussed online at that time. According to Google Trends data, between January and May 2009 the show was almost equally popular. There was a small spike in popularity around April 2009 (during Lambert's gay photo scandal), but popularity did not peak until the show's finale (See Figure 1). Meanwhile, Lambert's popularity as a performer – or, at least, the frequency with which he was discussed online – drastically changed during his gay photo scandal. The number of searches for his name increased during the time of his scandal more so than during the show's season finale (See Figure 2). This means that the overall audience likely had some increased

interest in the show when Lambert's photos released, but Lambert as an individual on the show garnered the bulk of the attention around the time of his scandal.

When we are discussing Lambert's audience and his rhetorical strategies, it is important to note that it is difficult to accurately gauge how well he convinced America to vote for him. First, while Lambert made it to the show's season finale, he did not win the competition. Second, even though he lost the competition, it is unclear whether or not this was because he failed to impress voters because of the infamous "text gate" scandal that happened at that time. For one, FOX did not release the details of how voting was counted for the finale, but rather said that there around 100 million votes cast in American Idol's Season Eight finale. But the real 'scandal' surrounding the voting was that "AT&T, Idol's official 'communications partner,' admitted providing free mobile phones and texting services to fans of [Kris] Allen [...] at parties organised in his home town of Jacksonville, Arkansas, on the night of the programme's final episode," and at these parties guests were allegedly shown how to send a "power text," which could "send 10 or more votes at the touch of a single button" (Adams). If these allegations are true, then it means that Allen might have won against Lambert because of an unfair advantage. However, even if the show's sponsor, AT&T, did manipulate votes, the lack of data on how many votes each contestant garnered is still unknown. In any case, FOX's decision to keep the vote tally private might make these allegations seem to be true, and even more so, it is possible that Lambert might have won the competition if this had not been a factor.

In terms of the audience for this particular *American Idol* finale, the Google Trends data shows that interest, or at least Google Searches for the show, increased drastically after the finale. On May 21, 2009 - the day after the Season Eight finale, searches for the show were double what they had been all season (see Figure 2). While the media conversation surrounding Lambert's

sexuality might have been part of the reason for the interest in *American Idol* later in this season, it is likely that the finale drew in these kinds of numbers. Some of this might have been because of the kinds of performers who were included in the finale, such as: *Queen*, *KISS*, Lionel Richie, Keith Urban, Cyndi Lauper, Santana, Rod Stewart—and the list goes on. However, if we compare the Google Trends data between this season and other seasons, then we can estimate that season finales generally garner more audience interest than most of the season, save for occasional peaks around when the live performances begin. There were seasons that were more popular than Lambert's, but the interest in the show around the time of the Season Eight finale is consistent with typical *American Idol* statistics (see Figure 3). The only information that we cannot see is for the first two seasons of the show, as Google Trends data only goes as far back as early 2004.

As we can see from this data, even if the competition was technically over before the Season Eight finale of *American Idol* began, the stakes were still high. Although past winners like Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood continue to be popular performers, being crowned the “American Idol” does not guarantee a successful career. Staying in the competition and making it far to the end can launch a career post-*Idol*, but that will not necessarily sustain a contestant's success or record sales—or even guarantee them a recording contract. So, a performer who wants to take advantage of their opportunities on the show needs to be remembered and seen as both talented and marketable. Lambert worked towards this all throughout the season, including in the two-part Season Eight finale. However, once a season of *American Idol* is over there is always a new batch of contestants. This means that each contestant's performance with a seasoned musical artist on the show's finale could be the last that the *American Idol* audience sees them. These performances are also relatively unmediated. While the producers organize these performances, the judges do not give any feedback on the performances, nor is there much preamble or discussion

afterwards. The producers set up which contestants and which performers will work together, the performers agree, and then the performances stand alone. In Lambert's case, he was paired with the rock band *KISS* to perform a medley of their songs.

### Questions of Agency

One of the most important factors in this particular rhetorical context is also one that is somewhat unknown: Lambert's agency as a contestant on *American Idol*. We can approximate some of his decision making and base our answers off of what both the producers and the performer have claimed, but we will never truly know how much free will Lambert had when it came to his use of camp style. What we can assume though is that if *American Idol* did not want something to happen, then it would not have happened on the show. This includes contestants' song and wardrobe choices. However, the show could not prevent what actually happened on stage during live performances—save from actually cutting mic feeds or video footage. This means that how a contestant sings, what they say, and how they perform can only be constrained to a certain extent. There is the possibility that the show could alter votes to prevent someone from moving forward—something that I will discuss in this chapter—but if someone makes it far into the competition, then we can assume that the producers approved of their creative decisions. *American Idol's* goal was to produce pop stars, of course, but Lambert's goal during and after his season was to create a public persona. While this seems like it would make it nearly impossible to differentiate between Lambert's actions and *American Idol's* actions because we do not know entirely who made each individual decision, we can still make some approximations based on what we do know and based on taking these two sides together. This is important because in the moments when Lambert was constrained as a performer, we can still see him making moves to stand out and make his own rhetorical negotiations. Further, we can see how both parties exerted agency in different ways.

We can see this particularly well when it comes to Lambert's initial decision to audition for *American Idol*. As he explains in *VH1: Behind the Music*'s documentary on himself, when he was pursuing his career pre-*Idol*, record executives liked him, but they found his overall style too "out there." He was a theater performer, but he needed *American Idol* in order to gain exposure as a recording artist (*VH1*). This kind of quick access to the music industry is important because it did not really exist pre-*Idol*. Before the competition series began, getting a recording contract required either having a good connection or being recognized—which was not an easy task for the average person. Further, social media only came about after the show had begun and it was not the star-creating machine that it is now, since it was still relatively new and unknown back in 2009. Thus, using *American Idol* as a platform was ultimately a career move. That being said, we have to consider how much Lambert knew what he was getting himself into in terms of his creative decision-making while on the show.

Although it can be difficult to determine how much agency an *American Idol* contestant has while they are on the show, we can make some estimates about the show overall and about Lambert's particular situation. Most of what we can deduce has to do with the show's discursive language. If we look at *American Idol* as a whole, we can see that the show is heavily produced—from themed weeks, to themed rounds of the competition, to video packages that introduce contestants, to *Ford Motors* ads featuring the contestants, and even to famous mentors each week on the show. The show also tends to produce specific types of performers each season, including the token "rocker." The show has featured rock performers such as: Chris Daughtry (of *Daughtry*), Constantine Maroulis, Bo Bice, and David Cook—who came after Lambert. The show also tends to have country performers each season, as well as typical pop performers. We can also see this weekly throughout the live rounds of the competition, with weeks themed after different genres of



music or highly influential artists in the music industry. Each of these weeks also had an approved song list from which the contestants could choose, but they seemed to have some freedom in terms of how they arranged or performed the songs. Even though we might not be able to find out how much this is intentional, common trends between seasons of *American Idol* make this seem like a deliberate choice.

If we look at Season Eight of the show through this lens, then we can see that Lambert was selected to fulfill the “rocker” role. This is important because this is where he managed to inject his camp style and exert his agency. Even from Lambert’s audition wherein he sang Michael Jackson’s “Rock With You” and *Queen*’s “Bohemian Rhapsody,” he constantly put a theatrical spin on each performance. This is an important facet of his camp because theatricality is inherently campy—as Susan Sontag claims all throughout her seminal essay on the subject. From Lambert’s audition, his theatricality was at the forefront before his rocker side. The producers interviewing Lambert before his audition had him discuss his theater background. After his audition, the judges continued to point towards this background. Simon Cowell’s first comment to Lambert was: “I think you are theatrical,” while Randy Jackson commented: “I think it’s time—currently, probably—for someone like you.” All four judges approved of his audition and agreed that he should continue on, but throughout the competition they would refer to his theatricality and musical theater background.

While his theatricality was at the forefront, Lambert was still the rocker of Season Eight. From his arranged performance with *KISS* in the season finale—which I will discuss later in this study—to Lambert’s rock songs and aesthetics throughout the competition, it seems as though the show’s producers were framing him as a rocker. Although he still remained within that framework, his actual singing—which the show’s producers could not control—turned these performances

from rock to glam rock. Lambert consistently sang and performed theatrically while under the guise of being a rock performer. This way, *American Idol* could not prevent him from bringing camp to the show because he was still playing into the rocker persona that they wanted him to.

Ultimately, we will never know with complete accuracy how much agency Lambert or any other contestant had on *American Idol*. However, we can see that Lambert used the show's constraints—including his rocker persona—in his own way. He brought camp style to the competition with his theatricality, which read as glam rock, rather than outright camp. The Lambert that will be examined in this case study was a product of the *American Idol* constraints and the show's producers negotiating his role, as much as it was built off of Lambert's theatricality both at the beginning and throughout the competition. Because of this, his campiness came through continuously when he played the show's "rocker" contestant, even when he was actually singing rock songs or performing alongside *KISS* and *Queen*. However, these camp signifiers were not completely unnoticed by viewers, particularly when the other implications of camp style came to light.

### The Implications of Being Campy

Partway through the live weekly rounds of the competition, Lambert's position on the show was challenged when he had to deal with a gay photo scandal. Photos of him pre-*Idol* were leaked to the press. These included the performer in drag, as well as kissing one of his ex-boyfriends. In the context of 2009, this was a shocking moment for *American Idol* and broader American popular culture. While Lambert waited until after the competition to publicly come out as gay, and he did not confirm or deny these allegations while on the show, his camp style was seen as a sign of his sexuality during that latter part of the competition (Draper 205). In order to understand why

Lambert's campiness was used against him, we need to take a step back and understand not only what camp is, but also its history with the LGBT+ community.

During this “scandal,” Lambert's camp style was under scrutiny each week. Further, even when the show wasn't directly focusing on Lambert's camp style and he even avoided it as a performer, it was still a constant subject of conversation with his sexuality still ambiguous: “such emphasis on Lambert's masculinity extended to persistent focus on his frequent use of eyeliner and nail polish. Judges commented on his make-up on a nearly weekly basis—in fact, they even noted when he did not wear it—while producers often referenced it in the brief video packages they prepared for him each episode” (206). While these moments were problematic, Lambert did feed into this to an extent because it helped him stand out in the competition. As he explains in his *VH1: Behind the Music* documentary, his motive in his performances is both to provoke reactions and to express his “true self.” Though he had doubts that America would vote for him if he came out as gay before the competition ended, he ultimately argues that though he earned many comments about being “too theatrical,” it was this kind of “standing out” got him to the top of the competition (*VH1*). In order to understand the full implications of Lambert's theatricality and glam rock and why these campier style choices were seen as signs of his sexuality, we need to delve deeper into camp style and its history.

Although camp style was first defined in the 1960s, a number of theorists have retroactively applied this term to Victorian dandyism. Susan Sontag herself argued that camp could potentially explain how the aesthetic dandy functions in a world of “mass culture,” and throughout “Notes on Camp” she quotes and references the ultimate dandy figure: Oscar Wilde (4). Consequently, camp style is often treated as an extension of dandyism. Theorists typically frame this as a matter of style and fashion. However, some make connections between dandy fashion and politics (Cook, Kaye,

Lezema, Shirland, de Vugt), or dandy fashion and sexuality in both the Victorian era and in modern times (Kaye, Ceranowski). The connections between dandyism and camp are important to recognize because many of the social implications that dandyism had in the Victorian era actually continue today with camp style.

As stated, these implications can be political—quite directly or intentionally so. Scholars discuss camp style and counterculture in different contexts, such as the Victorian era or modern mainstream culture and digital environments (Shirland, Kaye). Because of this, scholars like Geertjan de Vugt point to the rebellious nature of camp style. Specifically, in "Dandyism as Monumental-Political Ethos" de Vugt analyzes how camp figures and aesthetic dandies alike rebel against normative gender and sexuality in their pursuits, and further, that they are subverting societal expectations and pushing against boundaries. These scholars argue that people have long used camp to push against social boundaries, despite Sontag's claim that camp is "apolitical" (Cook, Lezema).

Style is another important aspect of both dandyism and camp, and it is often a rhetorical strategy that works towards the ends of cultural or social change, rather than something purely visual. Though it might not always be working towards a political end, understanding how to read visual style in this way can help us understand not only whether or not something is campy, but how and why it might be. Theorists like Jeremy Kaye and Jonathan Shirland have argued that Victorian dandies used their style to convey deliberate messages about democracy and sexuality, or even used their style to identify with other dandies. While this was often something accessible only to the aristocracy at that time, it is continued into iterations of dandyism in current times (Kaye, Ceranowski). Specifically, scholars argue that camp fashion is a political statement because

this style is so exaggerated and androgynous, and it subverts societal gender norms and expectations (Cerankowski, Lezema, Shirland).

Just as dandyism has been retroactively referred to as “campy,” modern figures have been referred to as “dandies,” and they tend to belong to the LGBT+ community (Ceranowski). Importantly, these figures—like Oscar Wilde, for example—were outed by other members of their communities and persecuted for their sexualities. According to these scholars, Camp fashion is something that is both lived and expressed in political contexts. However, camp style has also been a large part of more widely accessible modes of performance art, like ball culture.

In Jennie Livingston’s documentary, *Paris is Burning*, we can see a form of camp style situated within the LGBT+ community that has heavily influenced camp style in current times, both in drag circles and in the mainstream. Unlike dandyism, this practice reached socially and economically disadvantaged individuals in New York City, largely from African American and Latinx communities. However, in the twenty-first century many aspects of ball culture can be seen not only in other parts of the LGBT+ community, but also in mainstream and capitalist culture in the twenty-first century, as I will discuss shortly.

As Livingston’s documentary shows, ball culture functioned as a form of entertainment, escapism for its participants, and a safe space for the LGBT+ community. People participating in these balls would compete in different categories, dressing in costumes that reflected that category. There was a wide range that fit each kind of personality and performer. These categories sometimes involved drag performances, and highly theatrical and campy style, but just as often it involved “realness.” As the people documented in *Paris is Burning* explained, “realness” means “to be able to blend”—“to look as much as possible like your straight counterpart,” or like a ‘real’ woman. This is a term that has also been used in more recent times on *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, but it has

different implications. As Livingston's documentary participants explained, "realness" in their community meant the difference between traveling home from a ball safely and being attacked. In a poignant moment in the documentary, these implications are brought to fruition when we find out that Venus Xtravaganza, a transsexual performer, was murdered during the filming of the documentary. While camp can be an outlet within a ball, outside of that environment this style can be dangerous.

*Paris is Burning* ends on a bitter note that foreshadows how camp style would eventually change once it reached a broader audience. The documentary's participants note that ball culture became televised by 1989, and had become mainstream. They even deem this new version of the practice "boring." Camp style has since become much more largely mainstream in recent years with drag culture becoming a large part of mass media via *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

Camp style has only been theorized in relatively recent history. Before Susan Sontag's essay, "Notes on Camp," in 1964, the term had not been used in academia. In this seminal camp text, Sontag lists a number of claims about "camp," rather than providing one definition for the style. Much of this is because camp is a difficult term to define because it can be considered in a large number of contexts.<sup>1</sup> However, because Sontag intentionally avoids writing a clear theory or definition of "camp," it is still a term that can be difficult to name. The closest that Sontag gets to a definition of camp is when she argues that: "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (2). This definition of camp seems to hold true across scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> While I will not be examining other campy works, these other "contexts" range from musical theater, to drag, to media that is "so bad it's good"—like *Sharknado* or Tommy Wiseau's *The Room*. While these forms of camp might be worth analyzing, this study will focus on a very particular kind of camp because of its pertinent social and cultural implications.

conversations surrounding this style, as we will soon see. However, some of Sontag's other claims are less widely agreed upon.

One of Sontag's most important, and questioned, assertions about camp is that it can be divided into the "naïve" or "pure" and the "deliberate" (6). She tends to argue in favor of "pure" camp. What she means by this is that: "the pure examples of Camp are unintentional; they are dead serious," and that this is what makes camp style great (7). This includes any camp that is not aware that it is exaggerated or campy in any way. Sontag argues that: "camp rests on innocence," and that: "intending to be campy is always harmful" (7). In the context of Sontag's essay, these terms can be useful. However, modern camp needs to be analyzed in different terms than this because "intentional" and "unintentional" camp are sometimes one and the same. In this case, we will be focusing on something that resembles "intentional" camp.

Throughout "Notes on Camp," Sontag connects camp style to "mass culture" (4), androgyny (6), and nostalgia (11). However, she does make the argument that: "it goes without saying that Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical" (3). This is something that has long been contested after she made this claim, considering that even Sontag notes that camp style has long been an important part of the LGBT+ community's self-expression and artistry (12). This is something that this study will complicate, but other authors have pointed to this potential flaw in Sontag's theory. In "*Priscilla Fights Back*," Gilad Padva argues that camp cannot be apolitical because it "objects to the stigmatization that marks the unnatural, extraordinary, perverse, sick, inefficient, dangerous, and queer" (237). While Sontag's claim is not always so directly addressed, even in "Notes on Camp" she recognizes the important connection between camp and the LGBT+ community (12). Sontag might not consider camp something

political, but its extensive use by this community seems more than incidental. Further, camp style has actually been a large part of LGBT+ activism for longer than it has even been called “camp.”

In the context of this study, camp’s long connection with the LGBT+ community is important because of the ongoing discussions about Lambert’s sexuality in the latter part of the eighth season of *American Idol*. As I have discussed, the media speculation about his sexuality was always brought back to his camp style (Draper 205). While Lambert was going through his gay photo scandal, he never confirmed or denied his sexuality until after the competition had ended. While the photographic evidence clearly pointed to the fact that he might be gay, his style was as much of a factor. The camp style that he had taken on throughout the competition—which had already had some of these connotations—was then being taken as further proof of his sexuality. This meant that Lambert’s moves to stand out from the competition as a glam rocker were working against him because of camp’s implications, which complicated how his onstage persona was being interpreted from that point onward.

#### A Turning Point for Camp

An interesting factor in how Lambert’s camp functioned on *American Idol* in 2009 was that it fell on the crux of a cultural shift. Pre-*Idol*, camp style was not something that was widely popular. While glam rock artists like *Queen* or David Bowie, and other campy performers like Elton John had had massive success, camp was not a widespread cultural phenomenon. Performers using camp had stood out and been respected, but camp style was not a large part of popular culture. However, only a few years after Lambert’s turn on *American Idol*, camp style became widely popular with Millennials and Generation Z. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* brought camp style and culture to a broader audience, and many of its linguistic practices and attitudes have actually become major marketing tools across music, television, and social media. While Lambert was not



the cause of this cultural shift, had he appeared on *American Idol* any earlier or later than he did, he would have likely been rejected or reshaped further, or his camp style and his sexuality would have been embraced immediately.

*American Idol* itself also went through a shift post-Lambert. The show initially actually became more conservative and less risk-taking with the winners each season thereafter, and then finally shifted the opposite way after camp style became popular. In the new iteration of *American Idol* within the last couple of years, the show has featured a drag performer as a contestant. This has a lot to do with how camp style's position in the cultural imagination has changed, but it still has distinct ties to the LGBT+ community. Just as ball culture has bled into the mainstream in recent years, so have other kinds of camp. In "The Unspeakable Linguistics of Camp," Chi Luu examines how LGBT+ men in Great Britain long used "polari" to communicate with one another—which was both an extension of camp style, and a language that only members within the community understood—to avoid arrest when homosexuality was still illegal in their country. However, Luu explains that like with ball culture, polari eventually became a part of mainstream culture:

As these initially secret linguistic codes grew richer, celebrating a fractured, hidden subculture and its vibrant aesthetics, they slowly bled their way into the very same mainstream that didn't want them to exist, exerting a major linguistic influence on pop culture. Many contemporary memes and slang terms in mainstream pop culture such as 'yas Queen' and 'throwing shade,' for example, were appropriated from the unique linguistic practices of the queer community, often coined decades before.

This kind of "appropriation" is something that we can only see as problematic if we understand the political nature of camp style, at least within the LGBT+ community (Luu, Padva,

Cook). As Luu argues: “though the unique speech of drag queens emerged as a way to show belonging in a marginalized subculture, it may soon belong to a more mainstream audience who may not even be aware of its long, unspeakable history.”

This chapter outlined the important factors that go into Lambert’s rhetorical situation on *American Idol*. These factors limited certain aspects of his performance, opened up new possibilities, and affect how he was able to use camp style and have his camp style interpreted when he was on the show. The next chapter will go in depth with explaining Burkean rhetorical identification, the framework which I will use for analyzing my case study.

### CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will focus on explaining the theoretical framework that will be used in the analysis portion of this study: identification. This is important in order to explain how camp can be used as a rhetorical strategy with conflicting audiences, and how it can be used to identify with both audiences or even create new spaces. We will also need this to understand the kinds of identification that Lambert tries to achieve in his two main rhetorical situations: competing for America's votes, and remaining relevant post-*Idol*. These two exigencies are related and, as we will see, they have some similar implications, but both Lambert and the show's producers treat these particular situations differently. My framework for this study will focus on Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*, in which he defines and explains this concept, but it will also draw on other scholars who delve deeper into identification: Ann Branaman, Bryan Crable, Clayton W. Lewis, and Janice W. Fernheimer. Because this study aims to understand the possibilities of camp as a means of rhetorical identification—and how it might challenge how identification can work—I need to evaluate the range of arguments and complexities already surrounding this concept.

Beginning with Burke, he argues that “identification” is the goal of rhetoric, not persuasion (19). However, this does not mean that for Burke persuasion is not important because in order to achieve “identification,” a rhetorician needs to persuade their audience. To explain, Burke argues in *A Rhetoric of Motives* that “consubstantiality”—to be “substantially one”—is the ultimate goal of rhetoric (21). This is an audience's common understanding or agreement. For Burke, rhetoricians can only be successful if their audience is able to identify with them—to be consubstantial with them, or to find something of themselves in the rhetor. As he argues: “identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would

be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (22). Thus, persuasion is a means to an end, rather than the end itself. Further, Burke points to “division” as the force opposing “identification.”

While the concept of identification can be considered on a very broad level—containing many different levels of connection between rhetor and audience, scholars have analyzed how identification can be more complex than simply finding common ground (Burke 21). Furthermore, there are some conflicting understandings not only of how a rhetor might become consubstantial with his or her audience, but also the goal of Burkean rhetoric.

One of these main arguments centers on how rhetors navigate conflict or division, particularly when it comes to political rhetoric (Borrowman and Kmetz; Jones and Rowland). As Shane Borrowman and Marcia Kmetz discuss in their analysis of U.S. congresswoman Jeanette Rankin’s political rhetoric, a rhetor could “invoke identification as well as division” and “align when necessary and divide when required.” This is because Rankin was voting against America’s general consensus about to enter into WWII, but her home state of Montana still identified with her on another level (276-277). Further, they argue that sometimes division is as important a rhetorical choice as identification if it serves a greater good, and it is often inevitable that there will be some identification and division simultaneously when it comes to political matters (280, 278). Meanwhile John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland analyze how Ronald Reagan used identification with conflicting, divided audiences—the U.S. and The Soviet Union—in his address at the 1998 Moscow Summit. Here, these authors argued that “Reagan found a way *both* to reduce the level of conflict between the two nations [...] *and* also to maintain the fundamental ideological critique of the Soviet system that he had enunciated for decades,” and that he was able to “both *critique* and *support*, to identify consubstantiality underlying conflict” in that moment (78-79). Both of these analyses show us that rhetorical identification and division might work against each

other or somehow meet in the middle but ultimately, division is an integral part of Burkean identification.

One aspect of this division is the conflicting audiences. Scholars have looked to examples of rhetors and audiences that occupy conflicting spheres simultaneously, again in a political context (DeGenaro; Helmbrecht and Love). For example, William DeGenaro found that working-class populations, like farmers, hold a contradictory position that complicates their rhetorical identification. As he explains, “as working-class people use language to grapple with their identities, they do not simply deny class; rather, working-class people use rhetoric to perform class identities,” via poetry. For example, DeGenaro found that these populations might “[engage] in manual labor, [possess] little leisure time, [lack] the cultural capital of educated professions like medicine, and [live] frugally,” but also “[own] land and equipment and [engage] in a form of entrepreneurship” (386). This is something that has also been explored in terms of other conflicting positions, like in feminist “zines.” Brenda M. Helmbrecht and Meredith A. Love analyze third-wave feminist subculture through feminist magazine publications in terms of the contradictory identifications, in terms of how they “not only define [readers] as feminist rhetorical readers as either participants or outsiders to this newer manifestation of feminism” (152). These authors explain that these kinds of publications’ “ethos” is an important part of their consubstantiality because they show their credibility as researched sources, but they drive away non-academic articles. Meanwhile, the magazines that try to be more current have to be somewhere between outright “social critique” and still appearing “feminist” (154). In both of these situations, the audience is conflicting, and the rhetors involves have to manage conflicting identifications, and the potential divisions that might arise.

Another complication that scholars have found with identification is the kind of re-writing it can sometimes involve, which can include changing a previous narrative or creating something entirely new (Wilz; Stob; DeGenaro; Jones and Rowland). Kelly Wilz analyzes this phenomenon through the kinds of rhetorical rewriting and identification in the film *Jarhead*. She discusses the “rehumanization” of enemies or Others who have been dehumanized in the film, and looks at how that film “challenges current ideologies of soldiers and their enemies” (583). Part of this involves finding a common enemy for the audience and the “Other” to identify with (583), while it can also include identifying with a character in order to force us to empathize with their experiences because we see things from their perspective (591). Wilz argues that rhetors, or filmmakers, can use identification to “blur boundaries” or challenge previous understandings of two opposing sides (605). Meanwhile, Paul Stob argues that identification involves “*restructuring, readjusting, and reconstructing* forms of live given the actual conditions of personal and social experience” (236). Similarly, William DeGenaro points to how working-class rhetors have to consciously work towards “shared identity-construction” (395), mainly because “identification may only provide a temporary sense of togetherness” (396). Meanwhile, John M. Jones and Robert C. Rowland argue that instead of “blurring boundaries,” identification can be used to “transcend conflict” altogether by the rhetor emphasizing similarities over differences. This does not mean “undercutting” the conflict, but rather focusing on “shared identity” (82).

When we consider these kinds of analyses of how identification can function, we might also find that scholars disagree on the goal of identification for the rhetor (Stob; Wilz). Paul Stob argues that Burkean rhetoric is centered on “amelioration.” That is, consubstantiality is ultimately working towards the goal of bettering society (245). Kelly Wilz has a slightly different perspective on this, focusing more on resolving conflict than on overall society betterment (605). These

authors' interpretations of Burke's consubstantiality ultimately rest on the idea that identification should work towards a positive end, rather than purely rhetorical persuasion.

To break this down further, I will examine how other scholars have theorized Burkean identification. This includes their discussions of "dialectic," "ultimate order," the goal of rhetoric, and consubstantiality. Some of this was touched on in this section, but it mainly centered on how scholars applied these principles to their own research.

### Dialectic

When we talk about identification, we need to understand its opposite: division. Further, we need to understand the dialectic relationship between the two. As Ann Branaman argues: "identification is only necessary at all because of the division of individuals from one another" (451). These two opposing forces are connected; identification is the strategy for resolving division. Other scholars, like Bryan Crable, tend to agree that "rhetoric, dialectically redefined in terms of pure persuasion, produces the divisions that we humans would (paradoxically) discursively bridge" (216). He also argues that division is a necessary part of identification because a rhetor presumes that division exists and acknowledges it when they try to identify (236).

Crable further argues that an important part of the "dialectic" is that "it is continually reenacted, always in motion and never static" (217). That is, there will always be new forms of division and new dialectics, even as rhetors resolve them. Further, rhetorical identification might not be a permanent solution to dialectic. As William DeGenaro explains, "Burke establishes [that] identification may only provide a temporary sense of togetherness" (396). While dialectic might be a constant part of identification and its relationship to division, Burke and other scholars discuss how consubstantiality should lead to what is called "ultimate order."

### Ultimate Order

Branaman examines the idea of “dialectic” and “ultimate order.” Specifically, this is in terms of how in Burkean rhetoric ideas either have to be put in opposition with one another (dialectic), or a hierarchy. This hierarchy—or “ultimate order”—is where “rhetorical strength” lies (Branaman 451). Clayton W. Lewis also examines of ultimate order, but he uses the terms “kill,” “order,” and “the secret” in order to explain this phenomenon (370).

More specifically, Lewis argues that “an attention to [these terms] can help restore a lost vitality of” Burkean identification (370). To explain further, he clarifies that these three terms are interrelated. While “order” might refer to the “ultimate order” or hierarchy of rhetorical identifications, the killing is “division” and dialectic. Meanwhile, “the secret” refers to that which is unknown, including rhetorical motivation and the rhetor’s assumptions about his or her audience (Lewis 372-373). In these readings of ultimate order and dialectic, we can see that in Burkean rhetoric identification has the end goal of prioritizing identifications. While dialectic exists and is something that is constantly reenacted, Burke and these scholars propose not only that ultimate order might resolve this, but that it *should* do so. This brings me to the next part of the discussion: the goal of rhetoric.

### The Goal of Rhetoric

As I mentioned earlier, Burke defines the goal of rhetoric as “identification,” not persuasion (19). However, Crable and Branaman interpret this somewhat differently from Burke. Crable’s interpretation of identification is the farthest from that of other scholars. He argues that Burke’s concept of rhetorical identification is actually far less about “bring[ing] individuals together for cooperative purposes,” than it is “based on pure persuasion” (Crable 216). This complicates how we might understand or interpret Burkean rhetoric. However, it might depend on the rhetor’s



specific exigence. Further, it could be argued that the goal of rhetoric and for a rhetor might be persuasion, while it *should* be identification. However, there are other possible goals for rhetorical identification.

As Branaman argues, Burkean identification “*can* effectively serve as an instrument of social critique” (445). This is important because it is another possibility of consubstantiality, rather than an overarching goal for all rhetors. Earlier we even saw that Paul Stob argued that social “amelioration” was the goal of identification (240). However, Branaman argues that Burke’s identification, as a social critique, is more complex because it involves identification with the authority being critiqued (448). While this might not be the goal for all rhetors working to identify with their audiences in this way, Branaman still argues that it is important to acknowledge these possibilities and use this kind of rhetoric in this kind of context:

“Burke contributes a conception of identity which is both sociologically grounded and critical.

Rather than ignoring the socially imposed constraints upon the use of identity as a critical instrument, Burke explains how patterns of identification can be critical and transformative rather than merely reproductive despite the fact that experience is always already socially patterned (445).

Though the goal of identification and the possibilities of this kind of rhetoric might not be one in the same, these scholars have shown that it can be an important social tool, a method for persuasion, and identification in and of itself can be valuable. As Brenda M. Helmbrecht and Meredith A. Love add: “the rhetors objective, then, is to compel an audience to unite with the rhetorical aim at hand. As Burke explains, unification can be reached if listeners trust the speaker by identifying with two elements: the sentiments expressed in an argument and the rhetorical form with which they are expressed” (153).

### Consubstantiality

While consubstantiality bears resemblance to identification, it goes a step further. Consubstantiality—to be “substantially one”—with another person, is when the rhetor and audience have already reached identification and are “acting-together.” More simply put, consubstantiality requires some kind of action or goal, and the rhetor uses identification with his or her audience to achieve that goal (Burke 21). The rhetor does not simply want to identify or find common ground, but rather he or she wants to use that identification as a means to an end. As Burke explains, “in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*” (21). While this is important to understand for the purposes of this study, we need to complicate it further. In *Stepping Into Zion: Hatzzaad Harishon, Black Jews, and the Remaking of Jewish Identity*, Janice W. Fernheimer takes the concept of consubstantiality and examines how identification can be used to make half-steps towards becoming consubstantial, using the example of the Black Jewish community. The kinds of identifications that she described still lead to a kind of ‘acting together,’ although differently from Burke’s original concept. Fernheimer breaks down consubstantiality into a few important terms: universal and particular audiences, interruptive intervention, inventional opportunity, dissociation, and dissociative disruption. These are the main terms that I will be working with throughout this study, particularly because of the underlying issues of agency and persuasion that I discussed in the previous chapter.

Beginning with universal and particular audiences, Fernheimer explains these in terms of how rhetoric is conceived more broadly, as well as specific rhetorical situations involving specific people (91). The universal audience is then the audience that is always imagined in any rhetorical situation. This does not take into account the audience’s real identities, values, or feelings, but

rather what the rhetor can assume about them. Fernheimer then complicates this by bringing in particular audiences. These audiences have real, and often conflicting identities, to which the rhetor will try to appeal. But because these identities are conflicting and complex, the rhetor's cannot fully achieve consubstantiality with his or her audience (94). Fernheimer explains this concept in terms the goal of rhetoric:

Typically the criteria for measuring rhetorical success are grounded in expectations for changes that are immediately noticed and accepted. In other cases, rhetoric is imagined as a contest where the winner takes all and the 'successful' interlocutor is the one who persuades the audience to accept his or her side. In both cases, the assumption is that 'total' success is possible, that anything less is a failure, and that once such an argument is 'won' it does not need to be revisited (16).

Thus, when the rhetor is trying to identify with his or her intended audience and become consubstantial, we need to consider the possibility—and sometimes need for—partial consubstantiality. Fernheimer suggests that these rhetors are not “doomed to failure,” but rather that many of the consequences of their rhetorical action are seen in the long term, rather than the short term (16).

Another important facet of this kind of consubstantiality is the relationship between interruptive invention and inventional opportunity. Interruptive invention involves the “partial achievements” and “incremental steps” that a rhetor makes towards consubstantiality with his or her audience (17). Again, in this context full consubstantiality is not possible, or at least not immediately so. But what Fernheimer explains is that these moments of interruptive invention serve the purpose of creating inventional opportunities for the rhetor. That is, that these moments of partial consubstantiality “are at least partially successful insofar as they create a mechanism for

further inventional opportunities” because they open “rhetorical space[s].” It is within these spaces that the rhetor can not only keep making moves towards consubstantiality (18).

These moments of invention and interruption hinge on how Fernheimer conceives of the rhetor’s identity. Specifically, they involve how the rhetor can shape or reshape his or her identity in a particular context, which Fernheimer calls “dissociation.” If we look back at the discussions centering on rhetorical ultimate order, then dissociation is a kind of reordering or reprioritizing of identities in a similar way. As Fernheimer explains: “most people inhabit several identities simultaneously” and “the value systems of these identities might be in conflict” at any given point. Dissociation, then, is when the rhetor prioritizes one of their identities over another in order to appeal to a particular audience (95). This is a hierarchical kind of identity, but it shifts and changes depending on the rhetor’s needs.

Fernheimer takes this a step further when she discusses dissociative disruption. Building off of this notion of dissociation, she explains that dissociative disruption is a version of interruptive invention that focuses on the rhetor’s identity as a rhetorical tool. Particularly for rhetors who are constrained or have limited agency, dissociative disruption allows for the rhetor to “creat[e] and revis[e] common ground” and to “[call] attention to a problem” (91, 112). She argues that this is often necessary in order for rhetors “avoiding violence, allowing multiple and incompatible truths to coexist, and providing partial success when the complete ‘restructuring of reality’ is not immediately possible” (112). Ultimately, Fernheimer argues that this approach to consubstantiality “is a strategic and savvy rhetorical act that rhetors who lack conventional power can use to alter the rhetorical playing field and to initiate changes that may not take full effect until a much later time” (114).

When we take into account these partial moves towards consubstantiality as an important rhetorical strategy, we can see that identity and audience play a key role. Further, we can also see that rhetors working within constrained circumstances—like the *American Idol* context explained in the previous chapter—can still make partial steps towards full consubstantiality. Further, while the immediate rhetorical implications can often seem important, in these situations the long-term implications are often all that we can access. Meanwhile, in the short term we can see how these kinds of rhetorical moves can create new opportunities for consubstantiality.

This chapter discussed Burkean identification in detail, and potential complications to this initial idea. This theoretical framework is what I will then use for my analysis of Adam Lambert's performances later on in this study. The next chapter will discuss my methodology, and there I will develop codes from this discussion of identification that I will use to analyze my data. This will include preliminary codes on a small sample of data, as well as how this particular rhetorical concept will inform the study moving forward.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

So far in this study, I have outlined the previous discussions concerning camp theory and history, as well as the discussions centering on rhetorical identification, division, and consubstantiality. I have also discussed how we still need to understand how camp style can expand our understanding of this dialectic relationship, and how we need to examine an object of study that can help explain this phenomenon. In order to produce a theory that can explain this phenomenon, I need to perform a case study. This chapter outlines the methodology for my case study: the analysis of Adam Lambert's *American Idol* performances during the two-part Season Eight finale.

### Research Site

This study will present a case study of Adam Lambert's use of camp as a rhetorical strategy in the two-part season eight *American Idol* finale in 2009. I will be analyzing the two episodes that make up the finale - "Top 2 Perform" and "Season 8 Finale" - separately in Chapters Five and Six, respectively. Lambert's rhetorical motive in each of these episodes is different. In "Top 2 Perform," his three solo performances are his last chance to get America's vote and to win the title of "American Idol." In "Season 8 Finale," America had already voted, and the audience and the performers are waiting for the results to be announced. Lambert's performance here then has a different motive: to be remembered once the season ends. In that episode, we will be focusing on his performance with *KISS* because it most clearly demonstrates this motive, and it was his only opportunity in the episode to perform without the other contestants.

Adam Lambert's *American Idol* performances were selected for this case study for a few main reasons. First, he has openly referred to his style as campy throughout his post-*Idol* career, and even when he did not openly acknowledge this, he still used camp style in his onstage persona.

Specifically, he was referred to as “theatrical” throughout the competition, a term that Sontag used earlier to define “camp.” Lambert’s theatricality extended into his vocals and musical arrangements on *American Idol*, as well as into his subversive use of glam rock aesthetics in his performances. Second, Lambert’s time on the show can help us understand the tenuous position of a performer situated between counterculture and the mainstream. More specifically, he was amid controversy while he was on the show when it was discovered that he was likely homosexual, and he later came out after the show. Because of this, his camp style was initially advantageous when he began the show because it helped gain him attention as a performer, but it later was used to try to out him (Draper). Finally, while Lambert has used camp style post-*Idol*, his performances on the show in 2009 preceded the influx of camp style into the mainstream. In the decade since then, social and cultural attitudes have changed and his campiness on *American Idol* would be comparatively subtle in the late 2010s.

This study will use these performances in order to analyze how camp style can be used to identify with two conflicting audience: one countercultural and campy, and the other mainstream. This data will also serve as a means to an end, in that this study’s findings will be used to produce a rhetorical theory of how camp style can work in this subversive and mainstream way simultaneously, and how these negotiations take place. This theory will be interpreted from my findings at the end of this study, in Chapter Seven.

### Data Collection

In Chapter One I discussed the research questions that this study has been designed to address. As a reminder, these are:

- What strategies does Lambert use to identify with his campy audience?
- What strategies does Lambert use to identify with the *American Idol* audience?

- What is the relationship between these strategies in his performances?
- What is the result of Lambert's identification with these two audiences?

To address these questions, the following data was collected to understand Adam Lambert's use of camp style as a rhetorical strategy:

- Footage of Adam Lambert's three solo performances in the *American Idol* Season Eight episode, "Top 2 Perform." These performances are:
  - Contestant's choice: "Mad World"
  - Simon Fuller's choice: "A Change is Gonna Come"
  - Winner's single: "No Boundaries"
- Footage of Lambert's performance with *KISS* in *American Idol* Season Eight episode, "Season 8 Finale"

In accordance with John M. Creswell's concept of "qualitative validity," I will be triangulating my data in order to validate my findings from the above-mentioned videos (201). Specifically, I will use data outside of these performances that can help us understand Lambert's personal motives during these performances, as well as the decisions he made while negotiating just how campy he could be on the show. This data will also include information that provides a context in terms of the mainstream climate of *American Idol*. In order to do so, this study will draw on *American Idol*'s audience data, televised interviews with Adam Lambert, his performances of the same songs in other contexts, and VH1's *Behind the Music* documentary on Lambert. It will also take into account the context of each performance, including: the reason why each song was chosen, the judges' comments, the format of the show, and how Ryan Seacrest and the show's producers introduced each of Lambert's performances.



## “Top 2 Perform”

Each of the performances that will be analyzed were viewed on YouTube, as were the other data that I used to interpret these performances and validate my findings. I did see these performances when they initially aired in 2009 during the *American Idol* Season 8 Finale, as well as I am familiar with Lambert’s works and performances from throughout his career, so I know that the videos that were uploaded onto YouTube fairly accurately represent the performances that I am analyzing. I have also been to the *Glam Nation Tour* and the *Queen + Adam Lambert* tour, so I am familiar with how Lambert’s onstage persona comes across in a live setting. Although I had seen his *American Idol* performances and had strong familiarity with them, I extensively revisited these performances and this data during the time of this study. The data collected in addition to the performances then substantiates my claims about Lambert’s rhetoric, as well as it presents a more rounded view of these performances than my interpretation of the performances alone would.

### Performance #1: “Mad World”

In order to analyze this performance, we need to take into account its full context. In the episode “Top 2 Perform,” this was the “contestant’s choice” performance. This is important because of all of the performances that I will be analyzing this is the song that Adam Lambert chose to perform. This is where he has—arguably—the most rhetorical choice out of any of the other performances on the show.

It is also important to consider that this is not the only instance wherein Lambert performed this song. In addition to “Top 2 Perform,” he performed “Mad World” much earlier in the competition in “Top 8 Perform” during “Year of Birth Week” to a standing ovation from the judges. Since then, he has performed this song on the *American Idol* tour and on his own tours, as

well as on the show itself as a guest performer in Season 15 (“Top 5 Perform”). Lambert has since discussed his strong connection with the song based on his experiences feeling like an outsider when he was a child.

#### Performance #2: “A Change is Gonna Come”

While the first performance in this episode was the “contestant’s choice,” this second performance was “Simon Fuller’s choice.” Fuller was a longtime producer of *American Idol*. However, what was not known at the time was that Lambert had a history performing the song, “A Change is Gonna Come,” as he had performed it at the *Zodiac Show*—a very campy setting. These two performances will be contrasted in my analysis.

My analysis will also draw on Lambert’s discussion of the song in *VH1’s Behind the Music* documentary on Lambert. Specifically, we can see this in terms of both his performance at the *Zodiac Show* and how he discusses his connection with the song.

#### Performance #3: “No Boundaries”

The final performance from this episode is the “Winner’s Single”—meaning that it is the song that the winner of the competition will release as their first single. Because both Adam Lambert and Kris Allen had to perform the same song, I will contrast their two performances. Throughout the competition, these two performers were framed quite differently from one another.

#### “Season 8 Finale”

In terms of this study, I will be focusing solely on Lambert’s performance with *KISS* of a medley of their songs. This is the only performance that Lambert had during that episode was not a group number with other *American Idol* contestants, but it also most clearly demonstrates how his camp style changes depending on his rhetorical situation. That is, he has a different goal in

mind when America has already voted, and he wants to be remembered after the end of the competition. We can see this goal both through how Lambert's career changed after this performance, and because it was his last chance to use the *American Idol* platform to boost his career.

### Additional Data

In order to fully understand Lambert's rhetorical moves and how his camp style worked within his rhetorical situation, I will also be drawing on other aspects of the two-part *American Idol* Season 8 Finale. First, I will take into account the viewer demographics and statistics. Second, I will take into account both the voting data and the voting data, including what would later be referred to as the 'text gate' scandal. Third, I will examine the reactions of the people involved in the finale, particularly when it came to the competition's result: Lambert, Allan, the audience, Ryan Seacrest, and the judges. Finally, I will examine the trajectory of the show post-*Idol*, as well as how Lambert and Allen's careers have changed after the show using Google Trends statistics. These sources will, again, explain the mainstream aspect of the show, and the very real implications that using camp style in that setting had at that time. I will also be considering interviews, articles, and *VHI's Behind the Music* wherein Lambert specifically addresses his stylistic decisions while on the show and his ordeal with the media in order to understand Lambert's rhetorical moves in more detail, as well as the audience's reception.

### Analysis Methods

In the previous chapter I examined Burkean rhetoric, specifically identification. In the data analysis portion of this study—the case study of Lambert's performances—I will be using this conversation surrounding identification in order to analyze my data. In turn, this analysis will be used to develop a theory of camp style as a rhetorical strategy in Chapter Seven. Again, this theory

will not be able to explain camp in all of its uses, but it will be able to explain how camp can be used to navigate the gap between mainstream culture and counterculture in order to produce new spaces, particularly within the last decade.

### Data Coding

For the coding, or “indexing” part of the analysis (Ritchie and Lewis 224), I created initial codes based on Lambert’s separate rhetorical identifications with the *Idol* audience and with camp style (see Table 1). I then refined them based on my initial analysis of Lambert’s performances. As we saw in the previous chapter, identification has many components and potential implications. The reason why I broke these down into Lambert’s two main identifications are in order to draw larger comparisons between performances. Further, I will explore the context surrounding each performance and each episode in order to understand these identifications. Between Lambert’s rhetorical goals in and out of the competition, and the *American Idol* context I discussed in Chapter Two, his identifications with camp and with the show’s audience will help me to explain how he navigates this complex rhetorical situation. My initial analysis of Lambert’s performances focused on these codes, which in turn helped me to understand both his performance identities and the ways in which he used camp style within the *Idol* framework. After I did this initial analysis, I then refined my codes in order to examine Lambert’s separate identifications, simultaneous identifications, and his division. These were clear patterns that allowed me to see how he used camp as an identification strategy, and how he worked to become consubstantial with his audiences in order to achieve his goals. My findings from these refined codes were then used to analyze the rest of his performances, which in turn allowed me to produce a theory of camp rhetoric in Chapter Seven.

I manually coded the data for both the initial coding and the refined codes. This was important because I am analyzing not only video footage of a performance, but also because I am approaching it with a theoretical framework that I developed. As Johnny Saldaña argues, “there is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give you more control over and ownership over the work” (22). I first watched the performance in “Top 2 Perform” while taking observation notes, and then did the same with the other two iterations of the same performance. I took double-entry field notes in order that I could apply my initial codes to the data in the margins, and then refine them in my second coding process.

While the initial codes are centered on Lambert’s identifications separately, I developed the refined codes (see Table 1) after my initial analysis of one of the pieces of data used in this study: Adam Lambert’s performance of “Mad World” in the *American Idol* episode: “Top 2 Perform.” In addition, I used these codes to analyze three other versions of Adam Lambert performing this song, one during the show, one another on the *American Idol* tour, and one on a later season of the show, in order to cross-reference and triangulate my data (“Top 8 Perform”; smsbutterfly13; “Top 5 Perform”). However, the examples listed below come solely from his performance of the song in in “Top 2 Perform.” These codes do not change much from my initial codes, but they group together common themes and themes that emerged from the data that I had not originally accounted for in my theory. These new codes will then be applied to the rest of my analysis in Chapters Five and Six, but I will continue to revise them throughout the study according to the “constant comparative analysis method.” Though this is typically used for Grounded Theory approaches, this study will take both an inductive and a deductive approach to coding the performances, which will help round out the data for this study (Fram 1).

Table 1

Initial codes for Adam Lambert’s American Idol performances, using the “Mad World” performance (“Top 2 Perform,” 19 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Previous success with the same song on the show</li> <li>● References to Adam Lambert being in the top 2</li> <li>● References to the audience</li> <li>● Socially acceptable camp/ glam that the audience would like (“<i>Twilight</i>”), vs. too campy (“theatrical”; “<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>”)</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. Kris Allen</li> <li>● <i>American Idol</i> vs. Adam Lambert (“changing the game”)</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other contestants</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other kids his age (when they talk about his past)</li> <li>● Paula’s pride in Adam Lambert going so far on the show (need to clarify this moment)</li> </ul>
Identification camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How the judges frame his camp (too campy vs. standing out as theatrical)</li> <li>● Stylistic choice when compared to his previous performance of the song</li> <li>● Highly campy: fog, stairs, makeup, hair, long coat</li> <li>● Much campier than his previous performance of the song</li> <li>● Less campy than his performance of the same song on the <i>Idol</i> tour</li> <li>● Aesthetics, but also judges’ comments and how Adam Lambert discusses “dressing up” and choosing the theatrical route</li> <li>● Socially acceptable camp/ glam that the audience would like (“<i>Twilight</i>”), vs. too campy (“theatrical”; “<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>”)</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. Kris Allen</li> <li>● <i>American Idol</i> vs. Adam Lambert (“changing the game”)</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other contestants</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other kids his age (when they talk about his past)</li> <li>● Androgynous style (makeup, long coat)</li> </ul>

As we can see in the table above, there was some crossover between these two main categories. These are moments wherein his identifications with his two audiences overlap, and others when the differences between them are pointed out explicitly. These codes come mainly

from his two kinds of rhetorical identifications, but alone they do not explain everything that is happening during this performance. This will be resolved shortly (see Table 2). While this is not entirely a grounded theory approach, I employed Saldaña’s coding strategies for refining my initial codes. I moved between my theory and my codes, using his “codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry” in this process (12), though this will be something that I will revisit throughout the study according to the constant comparative method (Fram 1). These allow me to “build” my theory and “link” important ideas that emerge from my data (Saldaña 8).

Table 2

Refined codes for Adam Lambert’s American Idol performances, using the “Mad World” Performance (“Top 2 Perform,” 19 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Previous success with the same song on the show</li> <li>● References to Adam Lambert being in the top 2</li> <li>● References to the audience</li> <li>● Less campy than his performance of the same song on the <i>Idol</i> tour</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How the judges frame his camp (too campy vs. standing out as theatrical)</li> <li>● Stylistic choice when compared to his previous performance of the song</li> <li>● Highly campy: fog, stairs, makeup, hair, long coat</li> <li>● Much campier than his previous performance of the song</li> <li>● Aesthetics</li> <li>● Androgynous style (makeup, long coat)</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>American Idol</i> vs. Adam Lambert (“changing the game”) - showing Lambert as revolutionary in the competition</li> <li>● Socially acceptable camp/ glam that the audience would like (“<i>Twilight</i>”)</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. Kris Allen</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other contestants</li> <li>● Adam Lambert vs. other kids his age (when they talk about his past)</li> <li>● Too campy (“<i>Phantom of the Opera</i>”)</li> <li>● Paula’s pride in Adam Lambert going so far on the show</li> <li>● Judges’ comments and how Adam Lambert discusses “dressing up” and choosing the theatrical route</li> </ul>

As the table above suggests, I will be analyzing Lambert's performances according to the following codes: his separate identifications with the *American Idol* audience and his camp style, his simultaneous identifications with these two conflicting groups, and his intentional division. Some of these moves also come from the show's producers, judges, and host, but they will also be examined in these same categories in order to understand the full scope of Lambert's persona on *American Idol*, per my discussion of Lambert's agency in the previous chapter. Although he is the rhetor using camp style, how his camp was framed on the show is also important because the audience saw all of these rhetorical moves and perspectives as a complete package on television.

This chapter outlined the methodology for the case study of Adam Lambert's *American Idol* performances. Using the refined codes I developed in this chapter, I will analyze these performances in Chapters Five and Six, and then synthesize those chapters in Chapter Seven when I produce my theory of camp style as a rhetorical strategy. The following chapter will discuss Lambert's three performances in "Top 2 Perform," wherein he competes for America's votes.



## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF ADAM LAMBERT'S PERFORMANCES IN "TOP 2 PERFORM"

This chapter will focus on analyzing Adam Lambert's performances in the first part of the *American Idol* Season 8 finale: "Top 2 Perform," which originally aired on May 19, 2009. I will break down each of Lambert's three performances that night according to how Lambert negotiated his opportunities for rhetorical division throughout the episode, how he played into the *American Idol* game when he needed to, and how he dissociated his conflicting performance identities during, before, and after the competition. As we will see in this chapter, there is crossover in Lambert's motives for his identifications between performances, but how much he had agency in each performance changed—even within the *American Idol* framework, and the circumstances that led to the aesthetic choices he made also changed. Along with these performances, I will provide context for each one in the form of other iterations of the same performance, Lambert's thoughts on certain performances, and how the show's presenter and judges framed these performances with their commentary. As I discussed in Chapter Two, it is important to note that Lambert's actions and rhetorical negotiations need to be taken in context. That is, we need to keep in mind that all of his identifications and strategies are happening within the *American Idol* context, and that the campy persona he had by the time the show's finale aired was the product of an entire season of negotiations between Lambert and the producers.

Throughout his performances in this first half of the finale, Lambert identifies with his conflicting audiences different ways throughout the episode. He challenges the dialectic relationship between his divisions and identifications throughout, and he makes half-steps towards consubstantiality—the effects of which go beyond the voting for the finale. Some of Lambert's identifications with his conflicting audiences are simultaneous, but other times he and the show

emphasize his rhetorical division—both for better and for worse. I will begin by examining his opportunities for rhetorical division in terms of how these opportunities arose and how he used camp style to stand out in these moments. I will then examine how he played along with the *American Idol* game, both out of necessity and as a conscious rhetorical choice. Finally, I will examine Lambert’s dissociations both on and off of the show with performances of these same songs.

### Finding Opportunities for Division

One of Lambert’s main moves on *American Idol* was to play up his camp style. As I discussed earlier in this study, this was an important move for him to stand out in the competition. However, this decision to identify with his camp-loving Glamberts was often also an act of division from the *American Idol* audience, mainly because these two groups have different expectations and needs. While the Glamberts were a relatively particular audience, the *Idol* viewers on a whole were more of a universal audience. That is, it is clear that Glamberts were fans of Lambert for his camp style, but pinning down the much broader group of people watching the show required that both Lambert and the *American Idol* producers had to make generalizations about who their audience was. This meant looking at the audience demographic more broadly, and ultimately thinking about mass appeal and mass marketing whenever trying to identify with the show’s fans because the more particular, real audiences within this group could have had varied opinions and identities. Thus, in order for Lambert to play up his camp style in this particular setting and when he still required this group’s votes, he tempered his camp style with choices that he knew his larger, universal audience would still approve of. As we will see, the opportunities for him to make campy aesthetic choices throughout this first part of the show’s Season Eight finale varies, and he responds differently in each performance. This variation in his level of camp comes with a few

different reasons - ranging from his audiences, to his goal to win the competition, to the persona that he and the show created, to some of the more specific contexts surrounding certain songs and performances. Lambert negotiates how safely he can exaggerate his camp style, as well as how much he needs to use it to stand out from the competition and attract the audience that likes him for his camp style.

When we think about how Lambert exaggerates or tones down his camp style throughout the episode “Top 2 Perform,” we need to keep in mind that the more exaggerated camp is still relative. As we will see later with his highly campy performance with *KISS* in Chapter Six, his campiness in this first half of the finale is always toned down to at least some extent. We will also see that his performances off of the *American Idol* stage—both before and after the competition—are often far campier than they were on the show. This means that even when he leans more into camp style in the performances outlined in this chapter, Lambert is still holding back. But if we gauge Lambert’s camp style in “Top 2 Perform” separately, we still see variation from performance to performance.

Lambert’s biggest demonstration of his camp style in this episode came from his performance of “Mad World.” Here, we can see how he negotiated the camp style that made him stand out in the competition, and the moves he makes to identify with the show’s larger audience. In this situation, he performed a song that had not only previously earned him success and praise on the show, but that would continue to do so even seven years later when he would return to the *American Idol* stage as a mentor (see Table 2). This is important because this was the one song of the night that was the “Contestant’s Choice”—meaning that Lambert decided to sing that particular song. Because he had this prior approval with “Mad World” weeks earlier on *American Idol*, his performance of the same song in the eighth season finale best demonstrates the extreme contrast

between how he identifies both with his camp style and with the broader *Idol* voting audience. This was met with both success and criticism, as we will soon see.

In this particular performance, Lambert made campy set, wardrobe, and makeup choices. Though the arrangement and styling of the song were very similar to how they had been weeks prior, Lambert amped up his camp style in his aesthetics for his second rendition of “Mad World” on the show. Beginning his performance, he made a dramatic entrance: he walked down a staircase that had been placed in the center of the stage while at the bottom of that staircase there were fog machines. Together, these elements created a certain level of theatricality. Further, Lambert donned a dramatic look that pushed the theatrics of the staging over into the campy. His androgynous style in the performance included eyeliner, styled hair, half gloves, and a long, sweeping coat. The coat gained most of the attention in the performance, as the judges would note after Lambert sang. The singer took on somewhat of a gothic aesthetic with the moody fog, lighting, and all-black ensemble.

There are a few reasons why this stands out. Not only was this performance campier than his others during this episode, but it was also his first performance of the night so it set the stage for his other two songs. The reason why he could do so and go for such a campy aesthetic has to do with his history on the show. Lambert’s first performance of “Mad World” on *American Idol* was a stark contrast in terms of his campiness. When he first performed the song, he did so in a very stripped-back setting. Not only was his physical appearance much less dramatic and dark during that initial performance, but the judges praised him for his singing talent, rather than focusing on his style choices. Although they did not all get the chance to speak because of the show’s time limit, they all stood and applauded him and Simon Cowell said: “I think words are unnecessary,” while continuing to applaud his performance. Thus, when he took the exact same

song that had garnered him this kind of positive attention and infused it with his campy aesthetics, Lambert saw this as a safe opportunity to do so. As this was the one song that he had the chance to pick that night, Lambert actively took hold of that space to try to stand out in the competition, while also playing into his prior success on the show. This was his main opportunity to appeal to his fans that appreciated his camp style, standing out against Kris Allen, but also having somewhat of a safety net knowing that the song had garnered him positive attention in the past. These rhetorical strategies helped Lambert remind the audience that he not only gained their votes before, but that he was someone who stood out in the competition.

What also framed this performance was how the show's producers introduced the song. In the video package that aired before Lambert took stage his parents were interviewed, and they talked about how their son was always different from other kids his age. The singer contributed, talking about how he always wanted to "dress up" as a child and he always chose the theatrical route (see Table 2). Alone, this video package paired with this performance reinforces what Lambert is trying to do. He is using this performance to stand out, and he is taking the risk to go far campier with his aesthetics than he previously had because he knows that he received good feedback the first time he performed it.

However, the show's producers had made a similar move with the video package all the way back in "Top 8 Perform" (see Table 3). During that initial performance of "Mad World," Lambert generally made more mainstream appeals with his style choices and let his vocals and his connection with the song take precedence. Still, the show's producers contrasted his style in the competition with other contestants'. The video package that aired before that performance pitted Lambert's penchant for theater as a child with other boys' interests in sports, the singer even noting that he "was always really different" and his parents adding that he "wasn't like other kids his

age.” This brought attention to Lambert’s generally campy style—even in a moment when the performer was hardly identifying with his camp style at all. Thus, when he performed the same song again with a similar introduction for a second time with a far campier wardrobe and set, we can see a clear distinction between these two performances.

This reinvention of “Mad World” is the strongest example of Lambert’s interruptive invention in the episode. This performance was situated within a safer space because of Lambert’s previous approval with the same song earlier in the season, but it is also a strong move towards division. If he needed both of his audiences—the particular audience of Glamberts and the universal audience of *American Idol*—to vote for him in order to win the competition, then he had to become consubstantial with both of them in some way. In this case, this was a moment of interruptive invention because he was appealing to both of these audiences partway. While he was identifying with both audiences to some extent, he was also dividing from them because they are so opposing. This meant that he had to halfway identify with his camp style and halfway identify with the *American Idol* voting audience in order to be successful within the context of that episode and the show. As we will later see, this kind of move would lead to further inventional opportunities both at the end of the competition and in his career at large. We can see some of these moves and negotiations in Lambert’s other performances during “Top 2 Perform,” though they happen in subtler ways.

Lambert’s next campiest performance in this episode comes from a song that he did not choose because it was the “Winner’s Single”: “No Boundaries,” a song written for the Season Eight finale of *American Idol*. Having no prior context with this song, his negotiations involved the comparisons between himself and his competitor. If we look at how Lambert performed “No Boundaries,” we can see that Lambert is almost dressed like a glam rock version of Kris Allen (see

Table 10). Though subtler than his “Mad World” look earlier in the night, Lambert still went for a somewhat campy aesthetic. He donned a black blazer studded with rhinestones, along with very acid washed black and white jeans. His hair was not as heavily styled as it has been in some of his edgier performances, but Lambert’s chained belt, long necklaces, and remaining eyeliner kept him from looking completely mainstream. In terms of his vocals, Lambert also took a more dramatic approach than Allen. Rather than acoustics and a country sound, he went for an orchestral sound with powerhouse vocals.

When it came to this performance, Lambert’s negotiations of his camp style were based on the fact that he and his competitor would be directly compared to one another more so than in any other performance of the night. The very nature of having the contestants perform the same “Winner’s Single” as one another will only draw the audience and judges to make comparisons and determine which version of the song they like better. This meant that Lambert had to opt for a level of campiness in his style that was somewhere between his first two performances of the night. Again, this is an interruptive invention in terms of his partial identifications with both his campy audience and the show’s broad fanbase; he constantly had to negotiate how far to take his camp style in order to both attract the audience that loved him for it without pushing away mainstream *American Idol* fans. With the voting during this part of the finale determining the winner of the competition, Lambert’s aesthetic choices had high stakes. He was the primary negotiator in terms of how campy he would take his performances in the *American Idol* Season Eight finale, but how those performances were interpreted had a lot to do with how the show itself framed his stylistic choices. *American Idol* needed the drama of having two completely different kinds of performers competing against each other in their finale. Like with the video package that introduced “Mad World,” the show’s producers still needed to present something to its audience that they would

know and want. This meant that they often drew attention to the stark difference between not only Lambert and Allen, but also Lambert and every other competitor.

Throughout this part of the finale, Lambert took opportunities for division where he could. He used his camp style when he felt like he had already appealed to the broader *American Idol* audience in some way, since he knew that he needed these voters in order to have a chance of winning the competition. This balance was important because he needed his campiness to help him stand out, but with only one other competitor left—especially one who had a broader appeal, like Kris Allen—Lambert was going to stand out if he made any campy style choices. Thus, he needed to meet both of his audiences halfway in order to succeed both in the competition and outside of it. As we will soon see, this was his main challenge with his second song of the night, “A Change is Gonna Come.” While “Mad World” had been a sort of safety net for the singer, this second song had a far different context .

### Playing the *Idol* Game

There were times during this episode of *American Idol* where Lambert’s identifications were mainly with the show’s universal audience, rather than the particular audience of his Glamberts—who, as we know, are generally easier to identify with because they are a smaller group whose love of camp and Adam Lambert are at the forefront of their identities, based on the fact that their demonym comes from the combination of “glam” and “Lambert.” While identifying with these fans was, in turn, an act of rhetorical division from the typical *Idol* performer that helped Lambert stand out throughout the competition, focusing on these fans alone was not a strong strategy because they took up such a small part of the show’s demographic. Further, Lambert’s decision to go on *American Idol* to bolster his career shows us that he was aware that he needed to appeal to this audience in order to become successful in the music industry. The other key factor



that we need to consider is that Lambert needed to focus on this *American Idol* audience throughout most of “Top 2 Perform” because he did not have the same safety net with his final two performances that he did with “Mad World.” In these situations, he needed to identify with his mainstream audience in order to get their votes and have a chance at winning the competition.

The best example of this comes from Lambert’s second performance on “Top 2 Perform.” Lambert was asked by the show’s producer, Simon Fuller, to sing Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come.” This round gave Fuller the opportunity to choose songs for both contestants, but the producer likely did not know some of Lambert’s history with the song because the video footage of his performance did not come out until June 2009, after the competition had ended. In 2004, Lambert performed “A Change is Gonna Come” in a highly campy setting: *The Zodiac Show* (see Table 8). As its website explains: “the Zodiac Show is a multi-genre, music-driven, concert-style Theatrical event” that “unifies artists and performance from mainstream to avant-garde.” The event is centered around “Freedom” and is also referred to as the “Freedom Party.” Across the website, Lambert and other performers are promoted through mentions and pictures (Segars). In the case of Lambert’s performance at *The Zodiac Show*, he took the “avant-garde” or campy route.

When compared to his finale performance of “Mad World,” *The Zodiac Show* is on another level of campy altogether. Lambert’s onstage theatricality at this particular venue was visible in both his performance and his aesthetics. While the song is an R&B classic, Lambert took the stage with a far more exaggerated appearance than what we would see from him on *American Idol*, or even in his own post-*Idol* performances. He donned a full head of blue hair, black feathers on his wrists and around his collar, a fur vest, a fishnet shirt, leather pants, and extremely exaggerated makeup. The singer also had glitter all through his hair, makeup and wardrobe. On top of this, one of his band members was painted to look like a zebra. As for the performance itself, Lambert is

both highly emotional and impassioned – connecting strongly to the song – as well as he is over-the-top in his vocal performance. At one point, he changes a line in the song to match his campy onstage persona: “I don’t see what’s wrong with a little glitter ‘round my eyes” (thezodiacshow). As Lambert would later discuss in his *VH1: Behind the Music* documentary, this was a freeing feeling because this allowed him to experiment with his style and lifestyle pre-*Idol*. This rebellious environment was where he fit in, more than in his previous theater experiences early in his career, and his chosen song reflected those experiences and changes going on with his life at the time (*VH1*).

Understanding this campy context for Lambert’s performance of the same song in the *American Idol* Season Eight finale is important because it informed many of the decisions that he made when he performed the song on the far-reaching *American Idol* stage. As we saw earlier in this study, Lambert’s campier aesthetics were used against him during his gay photo scandal – seen as ‘signs’ of his sexuality (Draper 205). So, with a past performance at *The Zodiac Show* that was overtly exaggerated and campy, Lambert made aesthetic choices that were toned down and that aligned with the tastes of the universal *American Idol* audience. Further, his style choices were the main source of his agency in the performance because, again, Fuller chose the songs for round two of the finale.

Thus, when Lambert took the *American Idol* stage with the very same song, he went for a much more toned-down aesthetic than he would at any other point in the night. For this performance, Lambert still had some of the same hair and makeup styling as he did in round one because it was all in the same night, but everything else was as toned-down as it could be (see Table 7). The set behind him was simple, without theatrical staging or fog. Rather than the highly campy getup of his rendition of the song on *The Zodiac Show*, or even the more gothic camp of

his first performance of the finale, Lambert wore a classic grey suit, teal tie, and white button down. Overall, his accessories were just as minimal and clean as his clothing. Likewise, Lambert's vocals were less over-the-top and showcased his singing talent, rather than his theatrics. He might have a specific audience that appreciates his camp, but ultimately he needed to appeal to the broad *American Idol* voting audience with at least one more naturalistic, toned-down look in at least one of his finale performances. Further, Lambert did not have the same context with this song as he did with "Mad World." Rather than having a performance that had previously been praised by the show's audience and judges, Lambert had to contend with having the campiness of *The Zodiac Show* preceding his second performance of the night. Ultimately, he needed to balance his campy and subtle performances throughout the finale in order to truly meet both of his audiences halfway, or successfully have interruptive invention.

While Lambert's negotiations for his second performance of the night had this background for the performer, his final performance of the night was also a song that he did not get to choose because it was written for the show's finale: "No Boundaries." As I discussed in the previous section, this song was the "Winner's Single" for the Season Eight winner of *American Idol*, meaning that the winner of the competition would have his version of the song released on the radio immediately after the competition ended. As we saw previously, this song was performed by both contestants, so Lambert was put into a context wherein his performance could and would be compared to that of his competitor, Kris Allen. Further, this performance is asking the audience to imagine each contestant as their "American Idol" and to think about their voting choices wisely. Thus, Lambert had to stand out enough and put his own "spin" on the song, but this kind of standing out had to be toned down because beside his Christian, heterosexual, all-American competitor, even subtle signals to Lambert's campy style would seem fairly exaggerated.

If we look at what both performers wore onstage during their renditions of “No Boundaries,” then we can see how Lambert’s more toned-down camp style reads as a campier version of Allen’s look. Allen leans more into country and a mainstream approach in both his aesthetics and his performance (see Table 11). His version of the song was subdued and acoustic, with a slight country sound, while still showing off his vocal abilities. Allen had a simple set, and an equally toned-down aesthetic. He wore jeans, a jacket, and lacked the kind of hair and makeup styling that Lambert usually went for. Meanwhile, Lambert had a slightly edgier version of the same performance—from the instrumentation, to the vocals, to his aesthetics.

In order for the voting audience to both remember and prefer his version of “No Boundaries” to Allen’s version, Lambert had to make sure that his powerful vocals and orchestral instrumentals were on show. He also had to show both his loyal fans and the voting audience that he could make the song his own, while still producing something that a popular radio audience would still want to listen to. Thus, he also had to keep the comparisons between himself and Allen in mind. If he went for the same long coat and fog machines that he had opted for earlier in the night, then next to Allen’s toned-down performance of “No Boundaries” Lambert’s performance of the same song would seem too campy. Audiences would not have been able to imagine Lambert’s rendition of the song playing on the radio, and Allen’s version would be the easy choice.

We can see these kinds of negotiations on a larger scale if we look at how the episode was framed. What complicated Lambert and Allen’s onstage choices was that they were not the only people who would have a say in how their performances were presented or interpreted on the show. While I did discuss in Chapter Two how the *American Idol* platform had a role in the contestants’ decision-making behind the scenes, they also had explicit meta-commentary on the show that the audience could actually discern. That means that in addition to having some creative control that

the audience did not see, they had airtime during each episode to critique each performance and persuade the audience to vote one way or another. While some of this was genuine feedback, there were other negotiations happening throughout this part of the finale. Specifically, in order for the show to both have an interesting, exciting competition and to establish the show as something that appeals to the *Idol* audience, the producers and judges had to renegotiate Lambert's campy content. For example, the judges describe Lambert throughout the episode as: "changing the game," "iconic," "theatrical," and "original," both within the context of his performances and within the entire scope of the season. Meanwhile, they describe Allen as "compelling" and a good musician, but they do not make any mention of his standing out throughout the competition. This shows that Allen's onstage persona is not nearly as contentious or negotiated as Lambert's, and that most of the contrast comes from the judges discussing Lambert's role on the show. Between these moments and how the show's judges discussed Lambert's talent within the episode and within the full arc of his *American Idol* journey, and how they discussed his aesthetic choices, the show's producers and judges added their own layer of interpretation onto everything that Lambert did.

Much of this came in anticipation of Lambert's campiness. The show's producers made some standard for *American Idol* moves, while other times their choices were targeted directly at the glam rocker. At that time, a typical *American Idol* finale did include the same categories for the performances that were featured in Season Eight: the contestant's choice song, producer Simon Fuller's choice, and the winner's single. Though there was some variation from year to year and the show changed a fair amount in the 2010s, *American Idol* finales were centered on getting this variety of performances. Another typical inclusion by the producers were video packages before the contestants' performances. These were not included before every song—especially in a finale that featured three songs per performer—but each contestant would usually have one before at

least one of their performances. These packages usually introduced some background on the song choice, the contestant's life outside the show, or even the guest mentor for the week. As we saw earlier, the one video package included in this episode involved emphasizing Lambert's theatricality and his differences from the other contestants before he sang "Mad World." In the context of a dramatic competition between two far different performers, this move not only established the rest of the competition as fairly mainstream compared to Lambert, but it made it clear that the audience would be in for an interesting competition.

While "Mad World" was the only performance during "Top 2 Perform" that featured a video package, the show's judges continued to negotiate Lambert's campy style—quite literally. After his first performance of the night, the judges were not sure what to make of Lambert's campier aesthetic and staging choices. If Lambert's goal was to stand out by performing a song that this mainstream audience praised with a camp style twist, then he did succeed. However, the judges framed this as both good and bad. After Lambert's performance, the judges – particularly Randy Jackson and Simon Cowell – argued back and forth over the nature of the singer's theatrical aesthetics (see Table 2). While Cowell argued that Lambert was too theatrical by comparing his long coat to something from *Phantom of the Opera*, Jackson negotiated the potential mass appeal of that kind of aesthetic by comparing Lambert's look, disagreeing with Cowell: "no, no, it's *Twilight*," referring to the widely popular cultural phenomenon at the time. Though all of the judges commented on how Lambert tends to take the "theatrical route" with his style and singing, they also argued that as a performer he "changed the game" of *American Idol*. However, these positive remarks tended to look more towards the entire competition, rather than the high theatricality of just the one performance. This kind of broader discussion of Lambert's talents stems mainly from the fact that this was a season finale performance, so they had to remind the

audience of the long-term implications of their voting. They were no longer choosing who would stay in the competition, but who would win.

This kind of debating and reframing of Lambert's performances continued through the rest of the episode, though not to the same extent. After he performed Simon Fuller's choice, "A Change is Gonna Come," the judges focused mainly on Lambert's talent (see Table 7). Because of Lambert's more mainstream appeal approach to this performance, the judges' comments focused mainly on his vocal skills and emotional performance. While Kara DioGuardi focused on how Lambert managed to combine these two sides into a successful performance with major "high notes," Paula Abdul referred to him as a "superstar" and as "iconic" in both his appearance and vocals. Unlike with "Mad World," here Lambert's campy aesthetics are not referenced directly. Further, the judges and producers make no reference to how 'different' Lambert is from the other contestants in terms of his style or theatrical performance. Overall, the judges' comments are far more unified. They do not work to negotiate his identifications with his two audiences because Lambert has already done the work for them. He even thanks them and Fuller for the chance to sing this song in the show's season finale, mentioning that he "hadn't had that chance [to sing the song] during the competition." Though he never mentions his prior rendition of the song, it is clear that he anticipated the potential issues that might arise if he leaned too far into camp for the performance—both because of his performance on *The Zodiac Show* and his performance of "Mad World" earlier in the night. He needed to use this moment to balance his identifications in order to make interruptive inventions, rather than shooting for a consubstantiality that he could not achieve at that moment. He needed to meet his audiences halfway in order to get them to accept both his campy side and his *Idol* side, and ultimately make more spaces for further inventional opportunities after the competition ended.

With Lambert's final performance of the night, "No Boundaries," the judges refocused the conversation to feature Lambert's trajectory on the show because this would have been his first single had he won the competition. With a lack of time for real debate, Simon Cowell commented that Lambert was an "original" contestant on the show (see Table 10). Meanwhile, both Cowell and Paula Abdul discussed the contestant's post-*Idol* potential and how he will be successful after the competition, both claiming that he is a "star." All three judges commented on Lambert's immense singing talent, rather than focusing on drawing comparisons between him and his competitor. This is not far off from the conversation surrounding Allen's performance (see Table 11). The judges refer to the showdown between him and Lambert as "compelling," but they again shift the conversation to how talented Allen is as a performer. The judges ultimately use their voices to remind the audience that both contestants could have success in the music industry with not only "No Boundaries" but with their long-term careers. Again, the judges are making moves towards identification for both contestants because they are trying to get the audience not only to vote for the show's contestants, but also to be invested in their careers post-*Idol*.

This seemed like a fairly unified, clear position amongst the judges to focus on the marketable aspects of each contestant. However, host Ryan Seacrest's comments to Lambert after he received the judges' feedback on this final song reminded us that Lambert did have controversy in the latter part of the competition. Seacrest commented to Lambert: "there's been a lot of noise around the competition," but that Lambert "always knew what to do." Though this was subtle, it seems as though he was referring to the gay photo scandal that had worked against Lambert throughout the latter part of the competition. Because this comment came after the last song that Lambert would perform in the competition, this last moment was the last we would really hear from the singer or the people involved in the show before the voting began. Though nothing was



explicitly stated, and Lambert would not respond to any of these allegations until after the competition had ended, Seacrest's 'compliments' towards the singer's composure and ability to keep performing and showing the audience how talented he was drawing attention to how Lambert's journey on *American Idol* was far different both from Allen's and the other contestants' experiences.

Between Lambert's moves to identify with *American Idol*'s voting audience in certain moments throughout the episode and the show's efforts to negotiate his place as both a marketable pop star and an exciting, interesting part of the competition, it is clear that both the producers and Lambert were aware of the kinds of identifications they needed to make. Even though Lambert's standing out throughout the competition had helped the performer gain his own fanbase, this camp-loving group took up only a small portion of the show's voting audience. The show needed the drama of having the soon to be outed glam rocker compete against someone who was heterosexual and Christian. However, both Lambert and the show's producers and judges needed to emphasize the performer's talents in a way that would be well-received by the *American Idol* voting audience. As we will soon see, this *Idol* version of Lambert was very deliberately crafted. This persona represented parts of his identity, but both before and after the competition these identities would be dissociated in different ways.

### Lambert's Dissociations

The performances in this finale episode of *American Idol* did not exist in a vacuum. As we have seen, Lambert had previously performed "A Change is Gonna Come" and "Mad World," and would continue to perform them beyond the eighth season of the show. Through his own concerts, and even the *American Idol Tour*, Lambert's identifications with camp and the show's audience actually fragmented. Rather than bringing these two sides together each time he performed one of

these *Idol* songs, he would either emphasize his campiness or focus on his success on *American Idol* and as a performer in the music industry. That is, he dissociated his identities depending on his particular contest. Although this is not necessarily the direction of the rest of his career, “Top 2 Perform” demonstrates how Lambert bridged the dialectic for a brief moment in time to serve his purpose on the show. Sometimes his identities were balanced with one another, while even within the same episode he would dissociate in different ways multiple times. Meanwhile, his dissociations were more clearly distinct post-*Idol*. Specifically, we will see that these very same performances would be far more or far less campy in other contexts when Lambert was not relying on America’s votes. Thus, we can see that Lambert’s mixed identifications on *American Idol* were a deliberate choice.

Lambert’s initial performance on the first half of the *American Idol* Season Eight finale was also the first performance of the night. This was the one song that Lambert had the chance to pick himself, as it was the “contestant’s choice” round (“Top 2 Perform”). Of the three songs that Lambert performed that night, this one also has the most iterations both on and off the show, and based on his *Idol*-related performances, it is relatively well regarded in the show’s history. Lambert initially performed this song on the show several weeks prior in the episode: “Top 8 Perform,” on April 7, 2009 (see Table 3). Years after Lambert’s time competing on the show, he then returned as a mentor for a Season Fifteen episode and performed the song again in “Top 5 Perform,” on March 17, 2016 (see Table 6). Outside of *American Idol* itself, Lambert continued to perform “Mad World” on both the *American Idol* tour in 2009 (see Table 4), and on his own *Glam Nation Tour* from 2009 to 2010 (see Table 5).

In “Top 8 Perform,” when Lambert sang “Mad World” he had a much more toned-down aesthetic. When the performance started, Lambert was sitting in a simple chair wearing a jacket,

hoodie, and jeans. He did not have discernable eye makeup, and his hair was not overly styled. His entire color scheme was much lighter and more neutral than it would be in the show's finale, and he had an overall much more mainstream aesthetic than he would later take on. The only comments he had on the performance came from Simon Cowell, who stood and applauded him and said: "I think words are unnecessary." This success with the performance showed Lambert's talent more than his camp style. His decision to identify with the *Idol* audience in his aesthetic in that performance impressed the judges, and Lambert continued to succeed in the competition.

While this was his best opportunity within the finale of the competition to be campy, both Lambert and the show's producers seemed to recall his initial performance of "Mad World" far more than his dramatic finale version. When Lambert was called back to perform this song seven years later as a mentor on *American Idol*, the show's producers emphasized how successful his initial performance of the song had been when he was in the episode "Top 8 Perform" ("Top 5 Perform"). Before Lambert's return to the stage, the show's producers replayed the clip of the singer performing "Mad World" in that initial toned-down setting, rather than his Season Eight finale performance. Then, they showed Lambert live on stage singing the song once again, this time in a tailored suit with a minimal set. The only theatrics in his performance came from him standing and looking off to the side before turning to face the audience, but his overall appearance was a simpler, cleaner look (see Table 10). Ultimately, both Lambert and the show's producers emphasized the success of Lambert's first performance, while also pointing to how memorable the singer was for standing out from the competition with his campier style choices on and off the show. Even though Lambert had found an opportunity for division near the end of the competition, his initial identification with the mainstream was what this audience would remember. Looking at these negotiations, they might seem opposing from performance to performance, but *American*

*Idol*'s producers had different goals at these times. While when Lambert was a contestant, they wanted to highlight his differences to add drama to the reality competition; when he was a mentor on the show, they needed to show that they had created a well-respected superstar.

The best example of how Lambert navigates the identification and division dialectic and dissociates his identities is in the aforementioned performance he did of “A Change is Gonna Come” on his *Glam Nation Tour* (see Table 9). In that performance, he draws not only on his success on *American Idol* and with his first album, but also on *The Zodiac Show* where he got his chance to delve deeper into camp style (thefilmqueen). Throughout this concert tour, Lambert's rhetorical motive was complex; he was trying to make money touring, but he was also using his camp style in a way that brings people together. Throughout his *Glam Nation* shows, he would talk about “love” being the main focus of the show (Lambert). He wanted to bring people together and to find that identification, even if it was through the machine of *American Idol*. His particular fanbase, in the long run, was the most important one with which he needed to identify. However, Lambert's identification with this group by way of camp meant that he was creating division between himself and *American Idol*. Ultimately, this division is something that he had to balance with his identification with the show's universal audience in order to succeed within the competition. Division from the mainstream was a risky strategy across these performances because Lambert put himself in the position of being more noticed—both by fans and by the show's broader audience. For non-fans, Lambert's camp style could be the main focus of their attention, rather than the singer's talent.

This is made even more apparent when we look to how Lambert continued to perform this song post-*Idol*, and how he reflected back on what this song and performing it meant to him (see Table 9). On his *Glam Nation* tour, Lambert openly discusses both *American Idol* and *The Zodiac*

*Show*. Lambert discusses his success performing “A Change is Gonna Come” on the *Idol* finale, and how Fuller had asked him to sing the song. He also references how far he has come since then – about a year and a half after the finale – mentioning his worldwide *Glam Nation Tour* and his *Grammy* nomination. But Lambert frames most of his performance in his initial performance of the song at *The Zodiac Show*, introducing the song by saying: “ladies and gentlemen: that show I told you about six years ago [...] the circle is now complete.” He also discusses the struggles that he had had early in his career that he constantly pushed against in order to make it into the industry. Though this performance was stylistically more akin to how he sang the same song on *American Idol*, Lambert still aims for the glittery glam rock aesthetic, and he again references the same lyric change that he had made at *The Zodiac Show* involving the “glitter around [his] eyes” (thefilmqueen). Lambert ultimately understands that his closest fans look at his camp style and performance at *The Zodiac Show* as something appealing about his specific style. He knew that part of his role as the token *American Idol* rocker, or glam rocker, was to draw these fans in and continue to earn their votes, but he also knew that if he only identified with his Glamberts in a that setting that many viewers would not likely have voted for him.

We can see these same kinds of dissociations and negotiations of identity in some of Lambert’s other performances. Outside of the televised *American Idol* audience, his other performances of “Mad World” leaned into the campy style that he had exhibited in the Season Eight finale. On the *American Idol* tour, Lambert focused more on the fans before him because he was not concerned with gaining the appeal of judges or a voting audience (see Table 4). He had already made his initial moves for interruptive invention, so he needed to continue to do so with the new inventional opportunities before him in order to secure a career for himself moving forward. Thus, he took on a full glam rock aesthetic, including a spiked leather jacket, styled hair

with blue and green streaks, heavy makeup, jewelry, and gloves. Overall, *American Idol* itself tried to reconcile how Lambert's personal life and camp style brought drama to the competition with how marketable he could be post-*Idol*. While Lambert made some of these same moves, he was concerned with his own success while *American Idol*'s producers and judges were trying to fit him into a specific narrative that served the show. However, Lambert's moves were not completely renegotiated because he had different end goals than the show did. While we will see this in the second half of the Season Eight finale in Chapter Six, in "Top 2 Perform" Lambert would continue to make moves towards interruptive invention with the new inventional opportunities before him. He would need to in order to move beyond the *American Idol* stage and actually have success in his long-term career.

This chapter focused on the first half of *American Idol*'s Season Eight finale and how Adam Lambert negotiated how he could use his camp style to stand out against his opponent, Kris Allen, while also appealing to the show's universal audience in a way that would earn their votes and win him the competition. We saw that Lambert was able to use division as a rhetorical strategy in certain moments in this episode, but he had to do so carefully and when he had other factors working in his favor—like prior approval on aspects of his performance from the *American Idol* audience and judges. We also saw that Lambert had to do so within the show's limits. He had to play the *Idol* game in order to stay in the competition and have more opportunities for rhetorical division. Finally, we saw that Lambert dissociates his performance identities both on and off of the show. While before the competition he would play up his campy side and embrace the avant-garde, he would either prioritize this identity or his ethos as a successful musician in performances post-*Idol*. Meanwhile, his identities in the eighth season of *American Idol* were a merger of these two sides. The next chapter will focus on how Lambert's camp style changed when America had

already voted and he had nothing to lose; all he had to gain was staying relevant beyond the competition, and his camp style drastically changed in that setting.

## CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF ADAM LAMBERT’S PERFORMANCE IN “SEASON 8 FINALE”

This chapter will analyze Adam Lambert’s performance with *KISS* in the second part of the *American Idol* Season 8 finale, titled: “Season 8 Finale,” which originally aired on May 20, 2009. This was the episode wherein the winner was revealed, but in *American Idol* fashion it featured an array of performances from contestants who had been eliminated that season, as well as celebrity guests. While Lambert was part of other group performances with his fellow contestants, his performance with *KISS* of a medley of their songs was the only one where he was not singing with another contestant. It is important to note that he and Kris Allen sang with *Queen*—with whom Lambert now tours—backed by other contestants. However, Lambert’s performance with *KISS* is the one wherein he had the most agency and went the farthest with his camp style. This is not to say that he had no control over his style throughout the other performances, but Lambert’s performance with *KISS* best represents how both he and the judges negotiated his place as the token “rocker” of Season Eight.

Ultimately, that performance showed that he could be play into the expectations that the producers had set up for him, while being very, very campy at the same time. Further, he could actually succeed at doing so, appealing to both of his audiences. I argue that without the limitations of focusing solely on the *American Idol* audience, Lambert managed to use rhetorical division from the *Idol* audience—via his campy glam rock aesthetics—in a way that actually appealed to them. He needed to stand out in a way that kept him relevant post-*Idol*, and he finally had the platform to do so without the same consequences that he had had during the competition. In fact, he needed to do this in order to take advantage of the inventional opportunities that he had set up both in the first half of the final and throughout the competition.



### A Celebration of Division

Unlike in “Top 2 Perform,” Lambert did not have as much to lose by being campy in “Season 8 Finale.” Actually, he had more to gain. While in the previous episode he was inevitably going to stand out when compared to Kris Allen, his opposite in many ways, in this episode he needed to remind the *American Idol* audience why they should care about his career post-*Idol*: he proved that he could fit in with well-respected and successful musicians in his genre. This division—this intentional move to stand out from the crowd—seemed to work in Lambert’s favor. In the moment when he finished his performance with *KISS*, the audience and judges could not hold back their applause. The judges stood, looking amazed, and both *KISS* and *Queen* were impressed with the singer’s performance. Lambert’s aesthetics and performance were campier than they had ever been on *American Idol*, yet he managed to identify with both his universal and particular audiences, as well as the glam rockers he admired. With the larger audience that this finale episode brought in, as discussed in Chapter Two, Lambert’s campiness was a necessary move in order for him to be remembered post-*Idol*. Further, the performer had actual glam rockers—like *KISS* and *Queen*—and their fans in his audience.

Lambert’s performance with *KISS* in the *American Idol* episode: “Season 8 Finale” included a medley of some of the rock band’s greatest hits: “Beth,” “Detroit Rock City,” and “Rock ‘n’ Roll All Night” (see Table 12). The performance began with Lambert alone, singing the ballad “Beth.” This dramatic start to the performance was only beginning of the campiest version of Lambert that the *American Idol* stage had seen up to that point. The singer donned heavy eyeliner, spiked hair streaked with blue, and an all-black leather outfit. On top of this, it only got campier. Lambert wore exaggerated, wire, spiked shoulder pads over his leather ensemble, along with gold platform boots, gloves, and a healthy dose of glitter over his entire look. While he stood out from

the rest of the band once they were finally revealed, his campy take on glam rock still fit in with the face-painted *KISS* members.

After Lambert's initial reveal as the fully camped-out singer he could be, the band joined him on stage in at least as dramatic a fashion. When the second song: "Detroit Rock City" began, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley of *KISS* were lowered down from above the stage on a platform while real flames and sparklers lit up in the background. The band, as per usual, was in their full *KISS* attire. These theatrics continued through the rest of the performance of this song and "Rock 'n' Roll All Night." In terms of both aesthetics and vocal performance, Lambert kept up with *KISS*. The audience cheered after the performance ended and the judges all stood to applaud him, recognizing him for his talent. In this performance with *KISS*, Lambert showed off his vocal power and his abilities as a performer in a way that he could not during the competition—for a number of reasons.

While we will soon discuss the inventional opportunities that this moment opened up for Lambert, his performance with *KISS* was arguably his most unfiltered. At least, it is the one that he had influenced the most with his decisions throughout the competition to be the glam rocker—not just the rocker—on *American Idol*. As I have discussed throughout this study, Lambert was in the midst of a gay photo scandal that took hold of the media's attention during the latter part of the competition. His camp style was seen as further evidence that he was gay and was constantly used against him (Draper). However, once he got to the end of the competition and did not have to worry about America's votes, Lambert knew that he was going to publicly address his sexuality. Though he was not ashamed of his sexuality and he had been "out" in his private life for years, the concentrated mainstream audience of *American Idol* in 2009 was not as likely to vote for a gay *Idol*. Even more so, he did not want his sexuality to be the main focus of the competition or his

only identifying factor (*VH1*). Though the news was not made official until almost one month after Season Eight ended, Lambert came out to *Rolling Stone* only two days after the finale ended. He was not afraid to come out or even hesitant, but he wanted “control” and to be able to explain himself “in context,” rather than having the media and *American Idol* reinterpreting his identity (Grigoriadis). While in “Top 2 Perform” the show’s producers and judges tried to renegotiate Lambert’s camp style within the *American Idol* narrative—something that Lambert was aware of throughout the competition—his performance with *KISS* in the episode “Season 8 Finale” did not carry this same weight. He no longer had to worry about America’s votes, nor how the media would negotiate the relationship between his sexuality and his camp style.

Ultimately, with no need to worry about how campy he could be as a performer, Lambert was able to lean fully into this style for his performance with *KISS*. Furthermore, he would not be receiving feedback from the judges since this finale was treated more as a showcase than as part of the competition. He could make bigger leaps towards consubstantiality, in that he could more boldly make moves for interruptive invention because the inventional opportunities that it would open would be much bigger than those within the *Idol* context. Further, this meant that the judges would not negotiate or renegotiate his camp style, nor would the producers or host have the opportunity or need to comment on Lambert’s artistic decisions. More importantly, Lambert needed to push the limits of how campy he could go and really show his full potential as a glam rocker in order to stake a place in the public imagination for himself. He needed to establish that he was not just the token rocker of that season of *American Idol*, but rather someone who could succeed outside of the show’s limited scope.

### Creating New Spaces with Camp

*American Idol* provided Lambert and his competitors with a lot of exposure in a brief timeframe. While that can be useful for the show's contestants, it is what they do after the show that actually impacts their careers. Because the only person guaranteed a recording contract when the show ends is the winner, each contestant needs to find a way to be remembered post *Idol*. In Lambert's case, he used his performance with *KISS* in "Season 8 Finale" as a way of determining the direction of his career. His rhetorical moves were much bolder than they had been all season, with his aesthetics and theatrical performance matching that boldness. Ultimately, Lambert used division—leaning into his camp style more than ever before—in order to negotiate his place within popular culture. He needed to make moves for interruptive invention, and he needed to dissociate again, in order to create bigger inventional opportunities outside of the show. This simultaneous identification and division landed him in a place that was somewhere in between popular culture and camp culture. This is not to say that Lambert resolved all tensions between these two audiences. Rather, he negotiated a place within both the music industry and his fanbase. He was occupying the liminal space between these two opposing forces and creating something new, while responding to the situation he was in. He had been both praised and criticized for his campiness throughout the competition, and he was finally renegotiating that position and making both of his audiences identify with him.

In terms of his artistry and his relationship with the media, this performance allowed Lambert to truly embrace his camp style and perform in a way that he could not to the same extent throughout the competition. However, this moment was about more than his personal or artistic freedom. Lambert used his fully glam rock aesthetic and vocals in order to negotiate the direction of his career post-*Idol*. This final moment on Season Eight of *American Idol* certainly allowed

Lambert to express himself and his camp style in a way that he had not been able to do fully throughout the competition (*VHI*), but it was also an important career move. This is because he needed to build his own ethos as a glam rock performer. He showed that he could not only sing and perform like a glam-rock performer, but also that he could do so alongside a well-established rock band like *KISS*.

Although it is unlikely that we will ever know the results of the voting of *American Idol*'s eighth season finale, we can see how Lambert's performance with *KISS* set up the rest of his career—or at least part of it. If his goal was to establish himself as a credible glam-rocker, then he succeeded because he is now the front man for *Queen*. If we examine his camp style in his performances during the 2014 *Queen + Adam Lambert Tour*, then we can see that he makes similar moves with his aesthetics and vocals that he did in his *American Idol* performance with *KISS*. From more black leather, to shiny and studded jackets, to his makeup, to his platform boots, he continues to show shades of his *KISS* performance onstage with *Queen*. He might have more room for costume changes being that he now performs entire concerts with a glam rock band, and he might have taken on a slightly different aesthetic—with crowns, fans, and lounging couches—but Lambert's performance with *KISS* was a smaller-scale version of what his career would later look like. This might be due, in part, to the fact that he performed with *Queen* and his fellow contestants during the episode "Season 8 Finale."

Like *KISS*, *Queen*'s glam rock is part of pop culture. When Lambert performed with both of these bands on the Season Eight finale of *American Idol*, he negotiated his way into this space and made calculated career moves. His performance with *KISS* was, of course, the most notable version of this because Lambert was his campiest, as well as he was in a setting where he was the only contestant in focus. He was not just a contestant performing with a rock band; rather, he was

a glam rock star in that moment. The persona he embodied onstage with *KISS*'s Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley was the kind of persona that he would take onstage with *Queen* a few years later. Lambert's performance with *Queen* might not have had the same immediate impact because he was performing alongside his competitor, Kris Allen, and his aesthetics were far more toned-down than in the *KISS* medley, but Lambert managed to catch the attention of *Queen*'s Brian May and Roger Taylor during the episode. As May explains:

They [Adam Lambert and Kris Allen] were both good singers and both had a good presence on stage, and it was easy to interact with them. But it was really blindingly obvious that there was a chemistry already between us and Adam. It just happened completely naturally and made us all smile. The public reaction was massive, and so I think from that moment the idea of us working with Adam was seeded in our brains (May).

Although he had felt some need to restrain this campiness during certain performances when the audience was still in charge of his fate on *American Idol*, he knew that in order to stay relevant after Season Eight ended that he would have to use his platform to his advantage. With the massive audience tuning in to see not only the contestants but also the established musical artists featured on the show's finale, Lambert needed to prove that he could keep up with major players in his genre—*KISS* and *Queen*. Even though he never collaborated with *KISS* after his performance with the band, Lambert's commitment to camp style in that moment represents a turning point in his rhetoric from being centered on the *American Idol* competition to using that show create further inventional opportunities that would propel forth his career. This moment also presents us with a juxtaposition: Lambert proved that he could be the "rocker" of the season, while also being campier than he had ever been. His use of camp in this performance was an act of

rhetorical division that ultimately helped him create inventional opportunities for himself as a performer.

This chapter analyzed how Lambert's rhetoric changed from the first half of the eighth season finale of *American Idol* to the second half. His motive in "Season 8 Finale" was much more future-focused than his motive in "Top 2 Perform." While he made some of the same moves between these two rhetorical situations—and ultimately had similar goals concerning his camp and the *Idol* audience—we can only accurately assess the results of the latter because of the impact that Lambert's glam rock performances had on his career, while the finale voting scandal is still unresolved. The next and final chapter will tie together these analytical threads to propose a working theory of the rhetoric of camp. It will then discuss the implications that this study and this theory have on future research.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: SYNTHESIZING A RHETORIC OF CAMP

This final chapter of the study will synthesize the previous chapters to develop a theory of the rhetoric of camp style. This will come from my findings in the previous two chapters, and it will respond to the other conversations surrounding Burkean identification. This chapter will then discuss the implications of this rhetorical theory for future research in this field.

### The Rhetoric of Camp

After analyzing Lambert's uses of camp style across the two halves of the Season Eight finale of *American Idol*, we can see that camp can be a response to different rhetorical situations. More specifically, Lambert's onstage use of camp style can tell us how camp style functioned as a rhetorical strategy at this particular moment in time. Specifically, he identified with his particular and universal audiences separately in certain instances and together in other instances. Depending on his particular performance, its context, and his exigence, Lambert dissociated his identities. Further, he used division as a means of identification, as well as created long-term inventional opportunities for himself as an artist. When he used his camp style on *American Idol* back in 2009, camp was not nearly as widely seen as it is today. That is, camp style really had no foothold in mainstream American popular culture. Sontag more broadly defined the term, stating that: "the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (2). While we saw in Chapter Two how camp has been used in a number of contexts and its roots in the LGBT+ community are important, the way that Lambert used camp in the context that I analyzes can help us understand rhetorical identification. Further, camp's popularity post-*Idol* would have actually made it difficult for Lambert to stand out on the show. This particular moment in time was a rare situation for camp style, and Lambert took advantage of this space to make further inventional opportunities that would determine his career post-*Idol*.



As we might recall, identification and its opposite—division—have a complex relationship. While Borrowman and Kmetz analyzed how in a political setting a rhetor could “invoke identification as well as division” and “align when necessary and divide when required,” depending on the issue that they are addressing (277), Jones and Rowland argued that in a similar setting a rhetor can emphasize identification in order to minimize division, effectively re-writing a narrative to bring two opposing political sides together (79). We also saw that rhetors might hold two different social identities that they need to resolve, thus working with a kind of internal division (DeGenaro 386). Meanwhile, Helmbrecht and Love analyzed how rhetors trying to identify with their audiences might have to find a middle ground between two different audiences in order to attract both without driving another away (154). We also saw that identification might involve a kind of re-writing, which can include changing a previous narrative or creating something entirely new (Wilz; Stob; DeGenaro; Jones and Rowland). However, the goal of rhetorical identification often goes beyond purely finding common ground. Stob made the argument that Burkean rhetoric is centered on “amelioration” (245). Meanwhile, Wilz argued that identification is a means of resolving conflict (605).

Through this scholarship on identification and how authors theorized Burkean rhetoric (Branaman; Crable; Lewis), we know that identification and division are opposite, but the relationship between them is complex. We have seen that rhetors might negotiate identification and division simultaneously by balancing two opposing sides, or even emphasizing identification over division. However, this study has shown that camp style can work as a strategy both for identification and division, particularly when it comes to fundamentally conflicting audiences. I broke this down according to the following earlier in the study: separate identifications, simultaneous identifications, occupying the liminal space between identification and division, and

intentional division. Now I will discuss some of the key findings from this analysis in terms of the dialectic relationship between identification and division, ultimate order, the goal of rhetoric, and consubstantiality.

### Dialectic

This study found that the relationship between rhetorical identification and division are not always a clear dialectic. Specifically, I found that division is an important part of identification, particularly when it comes to camp style. The main issue with this kind of division is that it only works if it has the opportunity to do so. We saw that Lambert's moves towards division were calculated based on whether or not he thought his audience would be receptive to his camp style. This included making appeals to what his universal audience, the *American Idol* voters, had already liked—such as song choices that the voters and judges had previously approved of weeks earlier.

Division is also a strategy for standing out from a crowd. Again, Lambert had to make these divisive moves with his camp style carefully throughout the competition. When he was up against only one other performer, Kris Allen, and when that performer easily identified with the *Idol* audience, Lambert's more subtle versions of his camp style were going to stand out. Meanwhile, when he reached the end of the competition and had the context of his entire career, a larger viewing audience for the show, and glammed-up rockers beside him onstage, then Lambert could and did lean into his camp style in a way that he could not previously.

### Ultimate Order

Another key finding from this analysis is that camp style, when used in a mainstream context, required that it pays some attention to that particular audience. This involves a certain amount of prioritization, or dissociation. Lambert had to balance how campy he went with his style

with a few of different factors. One of these included the media conversation surrounding his sexuality, particularly since his camp style was constantly seen as a sign that he was gay. Another main factor was that Lambert had to take into account his previous context with certain performances. While having an *Idol*-approved prior performance of “Mad World” had allowed him to try some more theatrical aesthetics later in the competition, his earlier performance of “A Change is Gonna Come” at *The Zodiac Show* required that he tone down his look. Finally, the audience voting for Lambert was ultimately the deciding factor in whether or not he would win the competition. While he had his loyal, he still had to take into account that in order to have a chance at winning *American Idol* he had to identify with the show’s universal audience on some level, be it through more toned-down aesthetics or proving that he had the musical talents to win the competition.

#### The Goal of Rhetoric

Another key finding in this study was that sometimes division is actually an important strategy when the rhetorical goal is to stand out. Both Lambert and the *American Idol* producers fed into this, particularly when it came to the final episode of Season Eight. We saw that when Lambert performed with *KISS* in “Season 8 Finale” that his campy performance with the glam rock band was actually celebrated. Not only did the audience at the live performance—including the show’s judges—seem to respond with praise, but Lambert proved his ethos in that musical genre. Division was something that also had an unusual place within the competition. Specifically, the way Lambert’s performances throughout both halves of the Season Eight finale were framed was in contrast with his competitor, Kris Allen. The drama that his division brought to the competition was used to attract the show’s audience and make the entire finale more exciting for viewers.

## Consubstantiality

This study proved that Lambert's campiest moment on *American Idol* opened up new spaces for him as a performer. That is, if his end goal was to have a long-lasting career, then his interruptive inventions throughout the competition were required in order to create inventional opportunities. His performance with *KISS* after the *American Idol* votes had been cast established that Lambert could use division in order to do so, and that it would actually have positive implications for his career. Because *Queen* performed with Lambert and his competitor the same night and saw his theatricality in full, they continued to want to work with him post-*Idol*; he is now the band's lead singer and has been touring with them throughout the years since the show ended. This was a risk-taking moment for Lambert, but it ultimately meant that he could create a space for himself in the cultural imagination well after the show.

This study also found that when camp style is used to identify with two conflicting audiences, the rhetor's identities tend to become dissociated. In Lambert's case, his identifications with these two separate audiences only truly merged on the *American Idol* stage wherein he needed to balance his identification and division throughout. He was constrained by the show's format, producers, and audience, but he also needed to stand out from the competition both on and off the show. As we saw earlier in this study, when he performed songs like "Mad World" or "A Change is Gonna Come" off of *American Idol*, or at least off of the Season Eight finale, his identifications were much clearer. Specifically, he either played up his *Idol* appeal or he made direct connections with his fans through his campy style. Although throughout his career he has managed to be connect with each of these audiences at different moments, when he needed America's votes these two sides of his identity were the most connected.

### Implications for Future Research

This study has shown that camp style can be an important part of rhetorical identification. Not only has this become a more popular style choice in the time since Lambert's run on *American Idol*, but it showed that sometimes rhetorical division can be a means of standing out and actually identifying with an even larger audience. If we continue to analyze camp style as a rhetorical strategy, we can look not only at Lambert's career both within and outside of popular culture, but also other artists before and after him. From Victorian dandyism to glam rock, and even to current social media trends and *RuPaul's Drag Race*, camp is a big cultural phenomenon and an important rhetorical strategy for the LGBT+ community.

Further, we can and should understand how rhetorical division might actually be a means of identification, or how it might actually be an intentional strategy for other rhetors. By analyzing Lambert's use of camp in this way in his two different contexts on *American Idol*—as a performer looking for votes and as a performer post-*Idol*—we have shown that rhetorical identification can involve division, as well as it can involve creating new inventional opportunities.

## **APPENDIX: DATA CODING TABLES AND GOOGLE TRENDS GRAPHS**

Section 1: Performance #1 – “Mad World”

Table 3

Initial American Idol Performance of “Mad World” (“Top 8 Perform,” 7 April 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Toned-down performance aesthetic – he’s sitting, and wearing a jacket and a hoodie</li><li>● No real discernable makeup, and his hair is also more toned-down and not over-styled (more Bieber-y)</li><li>● Ripped jeans, scarf, neutral colors</li><li>● Simon is the only judge who gets time to talk, but he gives him a standing ovation, rather than talking (“I think words are unnecessary”)</li></ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Jewelry and half gloves</li><li>● Stands up theatrically during the performance (but still relatively toned-down)</li></ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● He was always really different (pre-performance interview), and spins that to show how good of a performer that makes him</li></ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Pre-performance, the show interviews his parents and they talk about how he wasn’t like other kids his age (theater &gt; sports)</li></ul>

Table 4

American Idol Tour Performance of “Mad World” (Video from August 3, 2009 – original performance: Atlanta GA on July 31st 2009; posted by: smsbutterfly13).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Song that did well on <i>American Idol</i> (and that he’d performed twice on the show)</li> <li>● The performance itself doesn’t differ much from the show in terms of singing and the amount of movement</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Full glam aesthetic – spiked leather jacket, styled hair with blue/green streaks, makeup, jewelry, gloves</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The audience contains Glamberts, but it also contains <i>American Idol</i> fans more broadly</li> <li>● Doesn’t specifically try to appeal to both or bridge that gap; mostly concerned about fans</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Doesn’t specifically try to appeal to both or bridge that gap; mostly concerned about fans</li> <li>● No comparison to other contestants for reference</li> </ul>

Table 5

Glam Nation Tour Performance of “Mad World” (Video from July 11, 2010, user: indybeck711; performance in Louisville, KY).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – mostly his own fans in the audience</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Body glitter, styled hair and makeup (lots of rhinestones on his face and heavy eye makeup), holds a glittery masquerade mask in front of his face before the performance, wearing a sparkly vest with matching pants</li> <li>● Backdrop with stars/night sky</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The music is acoustic</li> <li>● His performance is at least as toned-down as it was on <i>Idol</i> (save for the mask moment beforehand)</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – mostly his own fans in the audience</li> </ul>



Table 6

Lambert’s return to American Idol as a judge and mentor, performing “Mad World” (“Top 5 Perform,” 17 March 2016).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The show reminds us of Lambert’s initial performance of this song on the show (title before performance: “April 7, 2009”)</li> <li>● They show us part of that initial performance to remind us how good it was</li> <li>● Framed as a successful former contestant, and his vocals are the “star” of the performance</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Slightly more campy than initial performance (but more toned down than finale performance) – wearing a white suit, but starts off dramatically turned to the side and stoic with spotlights around him and a dark backdrop (standing the whole time)</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Vocals are still impressive, but also somewhat subtler/more restrained (part of this is likely because he’s improved so much in the 7 years between performances)</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Doesn’t need to do this (and doesn’t have the same motive to do it) because not only is camp more mainstream, but because he doesn’t have to hide his sexuality or worry about votes</li> </ul>

Section 2: Performance #2 – “A Change is Gonna Come”

Table 7

American Idol Performance of “A Change is Gonna Come” (“Top 2 Perform,” 19 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wearing a classic suit</li> <li>● Toned down hair and makeup</li> <li>● Not particularly accessorized</li> <li>● The judges all focus on Lambert’s singing talent after this performance, how that will help him with America’s votes, and even with how he might become “iconic” (Paula) after the competition</li> <li>● Toned-down set</li> <li>● Classic R&amp;B song</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Still has styled hair and eyeliner to some extent</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lambert’s “interpretation” of a classic song (Kara)</li> <li>● Still somewhat theatrical in his performance, but in a way that’s praised because it shows off his vocal talent</li> <li>● Paula tells him he looks like a “superstar”</li> <li>● Kara points to how his performance was both bold (“high notes”) and toned-down and emotional</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No references to how he’s different from other contestants; rather, his standing out is framed in a good way</li> </ul>

Table 8

The Zodiac Show Performance of “A Change is Gonna Come” (2004; posted by: thezodiacshow).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – mainstream song, but everything about the performance is highly campy</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In a countercultural (often campy) setting at the Zodiac Show</li> <li>● Very campy – Blue hair, feathers (gloves/wrist pieces and a collar), fur vest, fishnet top, leather pants, extremely exaggerated makeup (eyes, black lipstick, glitter everywhere), sheer corset (?), belt</li> <li>● Dramatic, theatrical singing all the way through (but clearly also emotional for him by the end)</li> <li>● Changes the lyric to draw attention to his campiness (and gestures to his makeup): “I don’t see what’s wrong with a little glitter ‘round my eyes”</li> <li>● Bass guitarist is painted like a zebra; other musicians are just in black</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – aside from the song choice, he really doesn’t have a reason to appeal to a mainstream audience and he doesn’t try to (the artistry comes first)</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – in that setting, he doesn’t stand out as mainstream or counterculture because it's a campy/countercultural setting</li> </ul>

Table 9

Glam Nation Live Performance of “A Change is Gonna Come” (15 December 2010, Music Box, L.A.; posted by: thefilmqueen).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Talks about how Simon Fuller asked him to sing this song on the <i>American Idol</i> finale</li> <li>● Mainstream success (world tour and Grammy nomination)</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lambert harkens back to <i>The Zodiac Show</i>, rather than <i>American Idol</i> when he introduces the song: “Ladies and gentlemen: that show I told you about six years ago” – and then he laughs and the crowd cheers; “the circle is now complete”</li> <li>● Wears a tour outfit – vest with a glittery “A” on the back, matching pants, white button down</li> <li>● Body glitter, hair, heavy makeup</li> <li>● Song’s countercultural appeal</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mentions world tour and Grammy nomination – despite not being typically mainstream</li> <li>● Argues that anyone can make it if they push back against the people who tell them “no”</li> <li>● Not as highly campy a performance as at <i>The Zodiac Show</i> in terms of theatricality in his singing (much more like <i>Idol</i>), but he still has a campy aesthetic (references the “glitter ‘round my eye” line again)</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Points to how the song originally had civil rights meaning; points to how the LGBT+ community “is in a civil rights movement right now” – personal meanings for him and the song (how he’s been told he won’t make it with his style)</li> <li>● Discusses how before <i>The Zodiac Show</i> he was told that his hair and eye makeup were too much and were making people “uncomfortable” even in rehearsal</li> </ul>

Section 3: Performance #3 – “No Boundaries”

Table 10

Lambert’s American Idol Performance of “No Boundaries” (“Top 2 Perform,” 19 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Paula and Simon talk mostly about the post-competition aspect of the show, and how Lambert will be a star beyond the finale</li><li>● Keeps the set simple</li><li>● The judges all comment on his immense singing talent</li></ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Somewhat campy aesthetic: Lambert wears a black blazer that has rhinestones or studs on it; hair and makeup done but not over-the-top; very acid washed/distressed black and white denim; jewelry</li><li>● References his performance of “A Change is Gonna Come” and how glad he was that he was able to sing that song on the show</li></ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Somewhat campy, but not particularly exaggerated (somewhere between the first and second performance of the night in terms of style)</li><li>● Orchestra, piano, big powerhouse vocals</li></ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Simon points to how Lambert was such an “original” (different) contestant</li><li>● Afterwards, Ryan talks to Lambert about how there’s been a lot of “noise” around the competition, but that Adam always knew what he “had to do”</li></ul>

Table 11

Kris Allen’s American Idol Performance of “No Boundaries” (“Top 2 Perform,” 19 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More subdued, acoustic-sounding performance than Lambert’s, but still shows off his voice and singing talent by belting the song as much as he can</li> <li>● Also has a simple set</li> <li>● Slight country sound</li> <li>● Jeans, shirt, tie, jacket</li> <li>● No makeup; toned-down hair</li> <li>● Randy – points to how “amazing” his performance in the competition has been (even though he points to the technical flaws in his singing)</li> <li>● Kara – agrees that the song was too high (and that that was an unfair test), but discusses how “compelling” he is as an artist</li> <li>● Paula – congratulates him and points to how “compelling” the Allen-Lambert showdown was</li> <li>● Simon – says that the “highlight” of Allen’s performances that night was his first one</li> <li>● Overall, less outright praise and less comments about the overall trajectory of his career than Lambert; he was a good performer and contestant, but they don’t mention anything that makes him stand out or that would make him a “star”</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● N/A – no countercultural appeal or camp at all</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Says that he and Adam “weren’t competing” but rather they agreed on just giving everyone a good show that night</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Comparisons to Lambert (Randy argues that the song fit Allen’s voice more)</li> <li>● “Compelling” showdown between Allen and Lambert (Paula)</li> </ul>

Section 4: Performance #4 – KISS Medley

Table 12

KISS Medley performance with KISS on American Idol (“Season 8 Finale,” 20 May 2009).

<u>Identifications</u>	<u>Evidence of These Identifications</u>
Identification with <i>Idol</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Singing with a well-known glam rock band (KISS) and singing a medley of the band’s popular songs with them (“Beth,” “Detroit Rock City,” and “Rock ‘n’ Roll All Night”</li> <li>● The audience receives the performance well</li> </ul>
Identification with camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This is Lambert’s campiest aesthetic on American Idol compared to everything he’s worn in the competition</li> <li>● Lambert has a glam rock aesthetic (very campy): eyeliner (heavy), blue streaks in his hair, spiky hair, black leather outfit, exaggerated/spiked shoulder pieces/wings, gold platform boots, gloves, glitter</li> <li>● Flames and sparklers when KISS comes onstage; they’re lowered via a platform (they sing “Detroit Rock City” &amp; “Rock ‘n’ Roll All Night” with Lambert); the band is in their usual full glam getup with the makeup and wardrobe</li> </ul>
Simultaneous & conflicting identifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Plays into the campy KISS aesthetic, but he’s still relatively toned-down compared to the other members of the band</li> <li>● Appealing to camp, but camp that’s recognizable (more well-known or mainstream) and works within the genre of glam rock performance</li> </ul>
Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This isn’t explicitly shown/referenced, but Lambert was the “rocker” contestant on the show</li> <li>● This is far different from any of the other performances that night, and it goes farther into camp and theatricality than Lambert had during the show, and especially during the previous night (the first part of the finale)</li> </ul>

## Section 5: Google Trends Data



Figure 1: Google trends data for the search term “American Idol,” from January 13, 2009 to May 31, 2009 in the United States.

Source: Google Trends

<https://trends.google.com/trends>

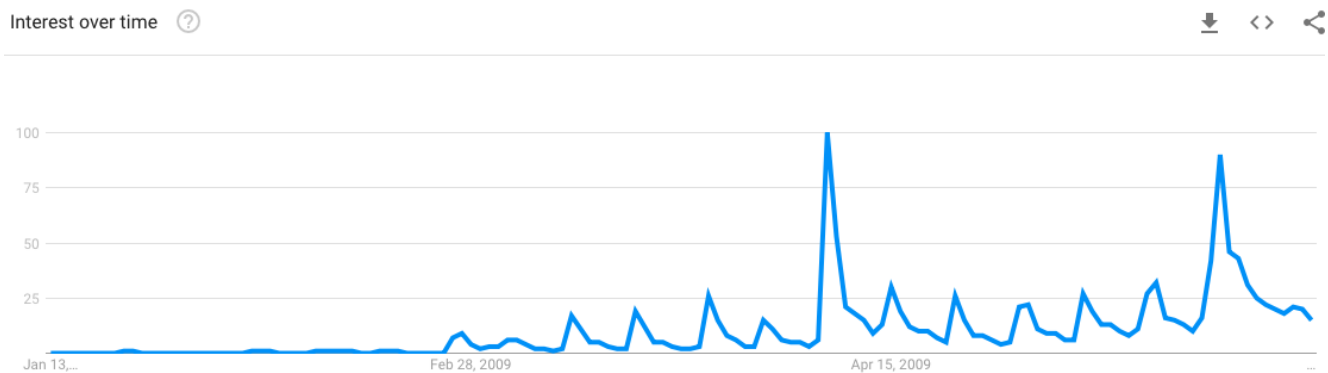


Figure 2: Google trends data for the search term “Adam Lambert,” from January 13, 2009 to May 31, 2009 in the United States.

Source: Google Trends

<https://trends.google.com/trends>



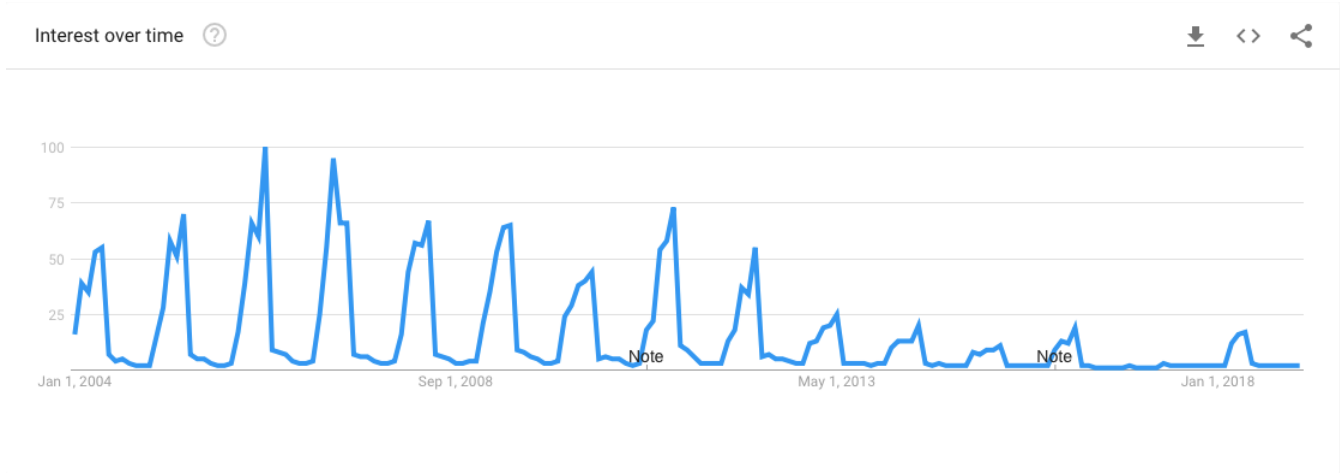


Figure 3: Google trends data for the search term “American Idol,” from 2004 to present in the United States.

Source: Google Trends  
<https://trends.google.com/trends>

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