Solitude and Solidarity:
Understanding Public Pedagogy through Queer Discourses on YouTube

by

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SOLITUDE AND SOLIDARITY:
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Abstract

Working alongside five queer-identified theatre artists, using critical arts-based participatory action research, this research project worked through a creative process in which the research team identified, deconstructed, and disrupted normative queer discourses on the video-sharing website YouTube. Using notions from queer theory, cultural studies, and anti-oppression education, along with embodied analysis as a deconstructive strategy, the research team used collective theorizing and performance to facilitate an analysis of the online videos. In this thesis, I discuss embodied knowing by analyzing performative moments in the creative workshop undertaken by the research team. I then provide a thematic analysis of the online videos, followed by an analysis of how the research team used collective creation and personal narrative to produce a counter-hegemonic response video. Finally, I conclude with a discussion on how to engage video creation as a form of anti-oppression education that queers public pedagogy.
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Chapter One: Queer Public Pedagogy

Six theatre artists stand in a circle. They collectively reach for the sky pulling down a large, yet invisible, magic box. They place the imaginary box on the floor and reach towards the middle as they mime taking off the lid. These six individuals have just spent two days discovering, creating and playing together. The box represents their time together and in turn each person reaches into the box to take something with them as they go their separate ways. “Community.” They reach in and shower each other with this first take away. One by one they move counter clockwise around the circle, making sure to bestow each person with their request through an embodied ritualistic offering. “Passion and interconnectivity;” “best queer theatre experience ever;” “other people’s stories about their families;” “queer theatre activism;” and finally “supportive people being here.” As the group of six make eye contact with one another around the circle, they reach to put the lid back on the box and finally work together to lift it into the sky. (Field Notes, June 16, 2013)

Introduction

The scene above depicts the final moments of a research workshop where six queer-identified theatre artists (myself included) came together as a research team to analyze videos containing queer content on the participatory media, video sharing website, YouTube. As evidenced above, the workshop became a deeply personal experience as we used embodied analysis, creation, and personal narrative to facilitate our research work. Each person was deeply involved in our site of inquiry, bringing their own knowledge and experience to the project. For me, the arrival at this research project began many years earlier.

When I was a teenager I struggled with the question: Am I the person I perceive myself to be, or the person other people perceive me to be? Which one is the REAL me? I would talk endlessly in circles with anyone who would listen, trying to discern the ever evolving question: Who am I? Around that same time in my life I spent countless hours asking friends to share their

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1 I use the word queer as a subject position in opposition to heterosexuality and as an identifier of individuals on the LGBTQQITT2SA spectrum. I recognize that not everyone identifies with these terms and that engaging queer as an umbrella term has the potential to collapse difference. Working from an understanding of subjective identities, I use queer as a term that provides space for unfixed meanings, fluidity, and diversity.
life stories, I would sit on concrete floors indefinitely diving deeper, asking for more detail, more insight. I was fascinated by how our experiences shaped who we were in the moment and who we were becoming. Often I would revisit these stories months later, intrigued by the way my friends’ stories shifted; it seemed that how we remembered our personal histories changed based on the context in which we told the story. At the time, I was searching for a fixed identity, while on a different level understanding that individual truths are constantly in flux. Now here I am, many years later, still thinking about representations, signifiers, discourses, and identities. This research project is about storytelling. It is also about the interactions between social, cultural and personal discoveries. But mostly it is a research project about performing and reading queer identities in popular culture.

**Research Problem**

In recent years, the internet has become a site of informal learning. We turn to our devices to settle a debate, to find an obscure fact or to simply browse through popular culture and news sites (Tomei, 2010; Wellman & Hogan, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that when I began to explore my sexuality I went to the internet in order to find a language that articulated the questions circling through my head. At that time social media was not yet embedded into our everyday lives. I eventually stumbled upon gay.ca, a bulletin board service inclusive of the queer community. I made an anonymous profile and lurked in the lesbian chat rooms, which were mostly occupied by much older women having discussions beyond my realm of experience. The internet was my first point of contact in understanding the social construction of queer identities; wherein identities are produced by culturally and historically specific discourses (Butler, 1991; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004), and discourse is understood as a system of knowledge and power through which we can make meaning of the world around us
(Hall, 1997; Sardar & Van Loon, 1997). Now, in the post-itgetsbetter era\textsuperscript{2}, we have undergone a discursive turn in online queer identity construction. This shift has seen us move from anonymous experimentation in text based chat rooms, to coming out videos and elaborate performances of queer self-disclosure (Alexander & Losh, 2010; Lazzara, 2010). By transforming a marginal space of silence to one of wide-spread representation, the new era is providing internet users with a set of identity instructions that are bound and policed by normative discourses; such as heteronormativity\textsuperscript{3} (Alexander & Losh, 2010; Bryson, 2004; Pullen, 2010). I recently facilitated a video making workshop for Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) groups from high schools in a rural school district in Ontario. As we began screening examples of queer cinema, the students quickly took over the laptop and started showing their favourite YouTube videos. The shared language, humour, and self-representation of queerness amongst the students came from the online videos. This was a powerful moment as I watched popular culture shape, define and work to fix the identities of these young people.

As the visibility of queer representations has become more readily available, I believe that the participatory web has opened up a space for what I am calling queer public pedagogy; defined here as a queering of popular culture in which normative discourses are contested and disrupted. Working with five queer-identified theatre artists this research project explores what a queer public pedagogy might look like by 1) identifying dominant representations of queerness on the video sharing platform YouTube, 2) using embodied theatre techniques as an analysis tool to deconstruct these videos and understand how they are (re)producing wider social and

\textsuperscript{2} \textit{It gets better} is a YouTube campaign responding to a series of queer teen suicides in America. In the campaign queer folks, allies, and celebrities share their coming out stories in an attempt to offer a sense of futurity to young queer-identified individuals experiencing homophobia.

\textsuperscript{3} Heteronormativity is an all encompassing institutionalized ideology that views heterosexuality as the norm and a universal truth. It is through heteronormative discursive practices that queer lives are marginalized, silenced, and made invisible.
historical discourses and 3) disrupting normative discourses of queerness through personal narrative and creation work. Specifically, this research project explores the following research questions.

**Research Questions**

1. How can theatre and media processes be used to transform dominant understandings of queerness as represented on YouTube?

2. What do queer-identified theatre artists identify as normative discourses of queerness based on videos available on YouTube?

3. What is important to queer-identified theatre artists in transforming and disrupting the discourses that are (re)produced through dominant representations?

4. How do the art forms of theatre and media, contribute (if at all) to an analysis and discussion of queer representations and normative discourses?

As a practicing theatre and media artist, and art educator, I am interested in the intersection of artistic form and content. How does art allow us to learn about the social world, and how do the power dynamics of our social world manifest in artistic representations? Therefore my four research questions can be further analyzed into two research categories: the category of artistic form (questions 1 and 4), and the category of social implications of online content (questions 2 and 3). These four research questions were developed and refined in collaboration with participants throughout all stages of the inquiry journey (Agee, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Kumashiro, 2002) and were used to guide an embodied exploration; first identifying and deconstructing dominant queer representations and discourses, and then disrupting and transforming them with our creative work.
A Road Map

For the remainder of this chapter I will offer a brief review of the literature pertinent to this research project. I will then conclude by identifying the need for this study and offering a theoretical framework that draws on notions from queer theory, cultural studies and anti-oppression education (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2011; Hall, 1997; Kumashiro, 2002; Sullivan, 2003). In Chapter 2, I explore the research methodology that I use by introducing critical arts-based participatory action research. I discuss how the research participants and I worked together throughout this project and discuss the notion of confounding roles in research. In Chapter 3, I provide an in-depth look at the workshop process, offering analysis and insight into using theatre as a site of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 analyzes the process of identifying, deconstructing and disrupting normative queer discourses on YouTube, and Chapter 5 offers insight and suggestions on how to engage video creation as a form of anti-oppression education. Chapter 5 also offers a final discussion on the significance of this project and its discoveries.

Literature Review

Participatory media.

Participatory media is an emerging field of study and practice (Howley, 2010a; Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010). It is a term that has shifted along with the changing definitions of media; originally synonymous with community television, radio, and newsprint, the term now encompasses digital technologies and new media (Howley, 2010a; Rennie, 2006). Broadly speaking participatory media provides opportunities for community members to participate in the media production process, with the intended aim of democratizing global media systems through local initiatives (Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010). More specifically, participatory media has
been defined as community-based activities that “supplement, challenge, or change the operating principles, structures, financing, and cultural forms and practices associated with dominant media” (Howley, 2010a, p. 2). Falling under this umbrella we have community radio, participatory video, citizen media, alternative media, community television, independent publishing, and online communication (Howley, 2010a; Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010). My interest in participatory media is in exploring the dialogical potential of new media and its creative process. This is still an emerging field of study and the language is used differently around the globe (Rennie, 2006). Therefore, when I speak of community or participatory media, effectively I am looking at participatory approaches to the process and creation of media and communication, rather than the commonly held understanding of localized broadcast media (Fuller, 2007; Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010).

Furthermore, participatory media has come to include the participatory internet otherwise known as web 2.0, where web developers are building platforms in which user generated content is easily created and disseminated (Farinosi and Treré 2010; Koltay, 2011; Miller & Bartlet, 2012). Examples include popular social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Miller and Bartlet (2012) state that in 2010, 25 million tweets were sent, 4 billion images were added to Flickr, and 24 hours of YouTube footage was uploaded every minute. Participatory media has enabled more people to provide information to the public than ever before and internet users are shifting from media consumers to media producers by building overwhelming amounts of laterally distributed knowledge and information (Farinosi & Treré, 2010; Koltay, 2011; Wellman & Hogan, 2004).

Within the literature on the participatory internet we see two opposing views; the first states that the internet is a democratic site wherein anyone with internet access is able to equally
engage, build community, create safe spaces, try out identities, and freely express themselves (Bryson, 2004; Driver, 2007; Torenli, 2006). The second and more recent view explores how the social world manifests in online spaces arguing that, as they are within society, social stratifications and sites of oppression are present across the web (Baym & boyd, 2012; boyd, 2009; Irving & English, 2011; Kendall, 2011; Wellman & Hogan, 2004). This argument suggests that internet access is not the only factor in creating inequitable internet use, but rather systemic oppressive forces contribute to marginalizing online spaces. For example, boyd (2009) suggests that class is an important factor in determining how and where individuals engage with online content; with upper/middle class individuals joining the social network Facebook and lower/working class individuals dominating a competing social network, MySpace.

In this research project I will be exploring the space between these opposing views, working to understand how YouTube operates as a both a hegemonic, and counter-hegemonic device. Hegemony is understood here as an powerful system of cultural ideas held and defined by a dominant group. This cultural domination of beliefs, values, and ideas produces a societal norm which is (re)produced through discourse. Counter-hegemony, in contrast, is the production of a competing set of ideas and beliefs, an alternative discourse that exists in opposition to dominant and normative ideas (Halberstam, 2011). Therefore, in understanding YouTube as a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic device, I will be analyzing how videos on YouTube are produced by and reproduce hegemony, but also how YouTube can be reclaimed as an alternative space to produce discourses not bound by the dominant.

**Public pedagogy.**

Public pedagogy is a concept within educational literature that explores informal sites of learning. The term was originally coined by cultural studies theorist, Henry A. Giroux where he
considered popular culture and mass media as (mis)education (Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). More recently the term has come to encompass possibilities for both reproduction and resistance to the status quo (Robson, 2013; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010; Savage, 2010). Adult educators, Sandlin, Wright, and Clark (2011), offer a wide-ranging definition stating that public pedagogy,

refers to various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning that occur beyond the realm of formal educational institutions - including popular culture (i.e. movies, television, the Internet, magazines, shopping malls), informal educational institutions and public spaces (i.e. museums, zoos, monuments), dominant discourses (i.e. public policy, neoliberalism, global capitalism), and public intellectualism and social activism (i.e. academics who engage with the public outside of the academy, grassroots organizations, and social movements). (p. 4)

Although public pedagogy is embedded within all of these various spaces, for this study I will be focusing on the representation of queer narratives within the user-generated popular culture of YouTube. It is my belief that this site of public pedagogy informs how queer identities are constructed (Bryson, 2004; Driver, 2007; Driver, 2006; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011).

Savage (2010) believes that the public pedagogy literature predominantly recognizes public pedagogy “as dominant forms of knowledge posited as negative ideological forces that are largely seen to act upon and corrupt individuals. Public pedagogy is thus expressed as the very thing ‘we’ need to fight against: as the debasing barrier to rational understandings of the world” (p. 109). Savage goes on to say that what this myopic view of public pedagogy fails to do, is see the counter-hegemonic possibilities of popular culture. In response to the assertion of public pedagogy as a form of disseminated knowledge, I believe that popular culture is becoming a shifting participatory form of knowing in which we are all producers and consumers (Koltay, 2011). Therefore, we must learn to decode public texts in order to re-imagine them as a site of resistance, not simply as a thing “to fight against”, but as a reclaimed space where we can
share diverse and counter-hegemonic narratives (Robson, 2013). With the accessibility and proliferation of participatory media, these “sites of public pedagogy, [have become] places where we go to learn, and places where we learn indirectly as we come to understand ourselves in relation to others and our culture” (Reid, 2010, p. 194). This research project understands YouTube as a site of artistic resistance that has the ability to reinforce normative discourses or expose them.

**Queer representations.**

Online spaces have become an important venue of self-representation, support, and belonging amongst queer identified people of all ages (Alexander & Losh, 2010, p.42; Bryson, 2004; Driver, 2007, p. 230). Through these online spaces, individuals have developed the ability to navigate and negotiate queer possibilities, and have learned how to construct diverse genders and sexualities through available discourses (Butler, 2011a). Discourse is a cultural and historical system of knowledge and power through which representations are produced, constructed, read and understood. As an example, certain videos analyzed in Chapter 4 represented queerness through discourses of shame, perversion, and homonormativity (godinvandevrede, 2012; Lizzy the Lezzy, 2010; Mykki Blanco, 2012). Therefore, queer representations on YouTube are produced by, and reproducing, dominant queer discourses. Through a thematic analysis, this research project uses online representations of queerness as an indicator of wider social discourses, working to expose the social and historical structures that are (re)produced in YouTube videos. A preliminary investigation into online queer representations is presented here:

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4 Homonormativity is the assimilation of heteronormative values into queer culture.
• Searching the word queer in a Google image search returns predominantly male representations (Online search, April, 2013);

• Searching the word genderqueer in a YouTube search returns predominantly white faces presenting confessional videos through what has become a dominant online aesthetic (Alexander & Losh, 2010; YouTube search, April, 2013);

• While exploring the queer blogsphere, Rak (2005) discovers a surprising amount of homogeneity; queer identified blogs were all centred “on a specific set of privileges, ideologies, and practices which would not be shared by most non-elites” (Rak, 2005);

• The autumn of 2013 is an important historical moment to discuss queer commodification and assimilation as the American same sex marriage debate dominates online spaces. In an Australian YouTube video, entitled “It’s Time”, with almost 12 million views at the time of writing, only a white, middle class, patriarchal representation of marriage equality is presented (getupaustralia, 2011).

Taken together, these online representations produce a hegemonic heteronormative discourse that operates as a set of instructions, identifying who deserves legitimacy. Upper-middle class, gay and lesbian, white Western identities dominate the web, marginalizing other gender non-conforming and diverse sexualities (Duggan, 2003; Pullen, 2010; Rak, 2005; Tsai, 2010).

Despite the internet being celebrated as a democratic space (Bryson, 2004; Driver, 2007), marginalizing power dynamics are evident across the web (boyd, 2009). It is not surprising that the diversity of queer identities are not equitably or favourably represented. Sandlin, Wright and Clark (2011) believe that “we learn who we are (or should be) with regard to race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on and whose cultures and histories are considered ‘normal’ and ‘dominant’ through the ways these cultures and identities are portrayed to us and
The intention behind this research project is to identify the hegemony inherent in online queer narratives and representations, deconstruct these messages by decoding what is unspoken and silenced within these representations, and then work to build alternative queer narratives that use popular culture as a site of resistance. This process works to identify and contest heteronormative discourses as they are producing, and produced by, the online representations. By engaging theatre and media creation as the primary site of data collection and analysis, this study came to understand the pedagogical potential of the artistic tools while also contributing to the reclaiming of popular culture as a politically engaged site of critical learning.

**The public sphere.**

According to Habermas (1989), “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public” (p. 27). Habermas was describing a singular democratic public arena in which individuals could discursively build political action and public opinion. More recent literature has challenged Habermas’ singular public sphere, and instead framed the idea of multiple and overlapping public spheres due to the systemic exclusion of marginalized voices within a singular public (Fraser, 1990; Howley, 2010b; Ndlela, 2010; Parlette, 2010). Therefore, Vatikiotis (2010) suggests that, “subordinate social groups respond to their exclusion from dominant publics by constituting alternative ones. The public sphere is thus viewed as the setting for the articulation of a variety of ideological and cultural differences” (p. 33). It has been argued that alternative public spheres, or counter-publics, have become more widely available through the proliferation and accessibility of media and technology (Baym & boyd, 2012; Howley, 2010b). This accessibility enables us to launch our personal narratives into the public arena, where they have the capacity to influence dominant thought, with the intention
of creating lasting change. In a 2009 TED talk, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie, discusses the power of personal narratives focusing on the importance of hearing multiple stories about individual people:

> How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power... to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story... I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. ... Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. (http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html)

YouTube videos are one of many media that can contain and deliver our stories. It is an exciting and engaging platform, where dialogues are built around the creative process, content, and dissemination. By harnessing the potential of new media, stories have the ability to traverse the planet in a matter of seconds. Together we can work towards deconstructing the single story, building instead, an inclusive space for multiple, overlapping and sometimes contradictory stories.

**Significance of this Study**

As demonstrated in Figure 1. there is a dynamic relationship between theatre, media and pedagogy, where each one contributes to and acts on the other. Theatre at the pinnacle of the triangle facilitates a deconstructive process that uses play, spontaneity, and creative devising work to deeply analyze stories (as told through both personal narratives and popular culture). The theatrical work engaged in this research project attempts to defamiliarize normative discourses through embodied analysis (discussed further in Chapter 2 & 3). On the next point of
the triangle, media production produces online representations that can be used as a site of disruption by contesting and challenging dominant ideas (discussed further in Chapter 4).

Finally on the third point, pedagogy facilitates the transformative aspects of this research project, working to build counter-publics and produce alternative discourses, through both theatrical notions of storytelling, and widespread media dissemination (discussed in Chapter 5).

In this research project, all three components come together within a queer discursive space, where the work is focused on dismantling heteronormativity and other marginalizing and hegemonic discourses by using artistic pedagogical practices. Each point feeds the other as they work collectively to deepen understanding and insight. Moving dynamically from one to the other and back again in a spiral of resistance to the status quo.

Figure 1. The interaction of theatre, media, and pedagogy in a queer discursive space.
I believe that participatory media holds extremely powerful cultural potential. By engaging with alternative creative texts and situating them within a public space, we have the opportunity to deconstruct and challenge normative discourses. This research explores how artistic dialogues challenge hegemonic structures by deconstructing homogeneous culture, uncovering dissonant viewpoints, determining who is being represented and who is not, and in turn transforming our publics. In doing so this research project addresses a number of calls in the above literature by (1) creating complex sites of political resistance (Giroux, 2010); (2) further exploring web. 2.0 as a site of adult education (Irving & English, 2011); (3) engaging with aesthetic aspects of public pedagogy (Robson, 2013); and finally (4) investigating how power circulates in online spaces rendering a narrow range of queer discourses as normative (Bryson, 2004).

**Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

At their core, theatre and media are collaborative art forms, therefore participants, researchers, creative team members, and audiences all have a stake in building transformative dialogues and pedagogical moments. Effective socially engaged art work highlights contradictions, provides space for uncomfortable silences, and most importantly fosters reflexivity before, during, and after the performance event (Eisner, 2008; Snell, 2013; Terret, 2009). This leads me to believe that applied artistic endeavours, such as research-informed theatre and participatory media projects, straddle the space between the critical and post-foundational paradigms (Creswell, 2013), working through ideas of both *conscientization* and deconstruction.

Like the artistic forms themselves, this research project is situated between the critical and post-foundational paradigms. From a critical framework, this research aims to assess and
challenge our dominant assumptions about knowledge production and dissemination (Dillard, 2000), working instead towards an emancipatory artistic language that can be utilized within the multiple and overlapping public spheres that are available to build public pedagogy (Ellsworth, 2005; Howley, 2010b). From a post-foundational framework, the content of this artistic exploration is one that attempts to defamiliarize and deconstruct notions of power, language and knowledge (Fawcett, 2008; Kaomea, 2003) by challenging dominant notions of queerness as presented online and identified by research participants. As a result of emphasizing contradiction, and analyzing the liminal space between discursive encounters, this research project is an opportunity to explore and deconstruct the interaction of art, power, research, and pedagogy, all on the precipice of social change (Fawcett, 2008). The conceptual and theoretical framework that I engage throughout this research project draws on notions from cultural studies, queer theory, and anti-oppression education. I will give a brief overview of the notions I am drawing from and then explore how overlapping and contradictory notions contribute to a deeper analytical framework.

**Cultural studies.**

Central to my theoretical framework is a Foucaudian notion of discourse (Foucault, 1972). Discourse, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a culturally and historically specific system of knowledge production, a set of meaning making practices defined and engaged through social dialogues (Wilchins, 2004). Foucault (1972) believes that discourse produces the knowledge/power system of a society; defined here as how a society produces, constructs, reads and decodes cultural texts. These cultural texts can include those found in popular culture, such as books, movies and YouTube videos, but can also include anything that holds a signifying practice or language, and is understood within a specific cultural context (Hall, 1997). For
example a haircut might signify a specific gender identity or a car make and model might signify the socio-economic class of the driver. These signs are produced and understood through cultural discourses such as gender normativity, sexism, consumerism, and neoliberalism. As demonstrated in the above examples, discursive power circulates in and between people as individual thought, behaviour, and identity is produced by discourse and can also reproduce discourse. Discursive power creates boundaries of normal by fixing the meaning of images and language. This is done as cultural knowledge/power creates a singular framework for decoding texts, creating a dichotomy where normal is easily recognized and reproduced and anything outside of the normative cultural framework is seen as bizarre, wrong, and unnatural. Knowledge is then applied to the regulation of social conduct producing certain types of social actors that are defined by dominant discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and class (Hall, 1997, p. 46). Through my analysis I look specifically at dominant queer discourses and heteronormative discourses as they are (re)produced through representations on YouTube (Fillingham, 1993; Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1978; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2011; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004).

For my theoretical framework, I also draw on the cultural studies notion of intertextuality. Stuart Hall (1997) defines intertextuality as meaning that is produced in the space between cultural texts (such as YouTube videos) and across a variety of media. Individual texts may not always contain much discursive power, but when these texts are deconstructed and understood in the context of one another, a discursive analysis emerges that explores wider social, historical, and cultural structures. Intertextuality allows us to make sense of the world around us; forging links between people, events, and experiences across a wide range of
Queer theory.

Throughout my analysis I draw on a number of notions from queer theory. As a deconstructive framework, queer theory works to expose heteronormative power structures by understanding how social categories are constructed, performed, maintained, and policed (Cresswell, 2013; Grace, 2008; Wickett, 2012). The first notion of queer theory that I use as a framework for challenging hegemonic discourses is that of *shifting and unstable identities*. This queer notion understands individuals not as rational fixed beings but rather as complex and contradictory beings (Sykes & Goldstein, 2004). I work from the understanding that available discourses construct people’s subjective identities (Butler, 2011a; Sykes & Goldstein, 2004), and that the discourses (re)produced on YouTube are working to maintain and police heteronormative identity categories.

The second notion that contributes to my theoretical framework is *queer theory as a deconstructive strategy*. Here I use queer theory as a tool that diminishes the power of heteronormative discourses by dismantling arguments and revealing hidden assumptions that are embedded in the online videos. Queer readings provide a space for alternative ways of thinking and living to emerge (Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004). Queer theory as a deconstructive strategy employs the word queer as a verb - *to queer*. By queering YouTube, my analysis aims to “denaturalize heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality and the relations between them” (Sullivan, 2003).

Finally, I draw on Butler’s (1990) notion of *performativity*, where gender is socially constructed through unconscious and repetitive acts that are produced by discourses acting on
our bodies. Butler (2011b) proposes that we are not born with a specific gender identity but rather the way that we act and speak gives the impression of being a man or a woman. Through these acts, gender binaries and static gender categories become defined, policed and upheld by heteronormativity. These three queer notions provide the study with a platform for understanding how online queer representations police queer bodies, while carving out a space in which we can build an alternative queer discourse.

**Anti-oppression education.**

Working with the understanding that homophobia and heterosexism are discourses that contribute to the policing of queer identities, I draw on anti-oppression education as a conceptual framework. In a 2002 book entitled *Troubling Education*, Kevin Kumashiro provides a comprehensive exploration into the theories and practices of anti-oppression education. After reviewing how oppression plays out in schools, Kumashiro (2002) suggests that there are four primary ways to “conceptualize and work against oppression: education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society” (p. 31). Kumashiro uses the term Other to refer to groups that are traditionally marginalized. “They are often defined in opposition to groups traditionally favored, normalized, or privileged in society and as such, are defined as other than the idealized norm” (p. 32). When I refer to the Other or being Othered, I am drawing on Kumashiro’s understanding of Otherness in direct opposition to the idealized norm.

Education *for* the Other focuses on improving the experiences of learners who are Othered by creating accessible and inclusive learning environments. This approach calls on educators to recognize that there is diversity within their schools and classrooms, but it is
limited in that it fails to address systemic causes of oppression, it requires a definition of the Other, and does not leave space for intersecting identities.

Education about the Other, provides learners the opportunity to learn about the histories and experiences of groups who experience oppression, working to build empathy and understanding across lines of privilege and oppression. There are two challenges in education about the Other. The first is when stereotypical representations are expressed and biases are reinforced through partial perspectives or understandings. The second occurs when comparisons are made between the Other and the norm creating an us and them dichotomy.

Education that is critical of privileging and Othering attempts to critique oppression by focusing instead on who is dominant, favoured or normalized. This approach requires learners to inhabit their own privileges, which can be uncomfortable as students work to understand their own complicity in these processes. It also works under the assumption that once learners are aware of oppression they will actively work against it, which may not be the case.

In the final approach, education that changes students and society Kumashiro works through a poststructural understanding of a subjective self in relation to Other and in relation to society. Proposing a framework of unknowing and deconstruction. Through discursive conceptualizations of oppression, Kumashiro works to complicate the other three approaches. Drawing on notions of deconstruction this research project engages with this final approach by defamiliarizing queer representations that we might otherwise take for granted or accept as the norm. Through this process the research team was able to analyze how oppression is discursively (re)produced and then build alternative representations that engage simultaneously with all four approaches.
Through his substantial literature review, Kumashiro (2002) argues that each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, suggesting that effective anti-oppression pedagogy must draw from all four approaches. As a conceptual framework I engage Kumashiro’s four approaches to understand how queer public pedagogy, as defined in this research project, can facilitate all four approaches to anti-oppression education.

The second anti-oppression education conceptual framework that I engage in my analysis is the triangle model of oppression (McCaskell, 2005). This model (see Figure 2.) explores how ideas, institutions and individuals feed one another as they (re)produce systemic oppression. For this research project I explore popular culture as an institution that informs individual behaviour and social ideas by producing discursive norms that are policed and upheld by all three points on the triangle. With understanding participatory media as a site of popular culture we can also see how individuals who produce content feed the institution of popular culture and reinforce cultural norms and ideas. I revisit this notion in more detail in Chapter 4.

**Queering Anti-Oppression Education Through Cultural Analysis**

The theoretical and conceptual framework underlying this study draws on notions from three different areas of study. Taken together they provide a very powerful analytical structure.
In summary, discourse is a system of knowledge/power through which representations are produced and understood. Hegemonic, and often heteronormative, discourses, are perpetuated, reinforced and represented on YouTube and work to police and regulate queer bodies. Foucault (1978) believes that “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (pp. 100-101). This subversive quality is important as this research project works towards concrete transformative political action, working first to deconstruct, and then to disrupt heteronormativity and other marginalizing queer discourses.

The theoretical framework I employ throughout my analysis is concerned with using cultural texts to dismantle hegemonic discourses by queering online spaces. Despite their sometimes contradictory ideas, this requires me to draw on notions from queer theory and anti-oppression education. Post-structural and queer notions of deconstruction as a political strategy fall short of creating lasting systemic change (Sullivan, 2003). However, if we use queer theory to reveal hidden assumptions by defamiliarizing dominant discourses and engaging from the margins, then we can build effective anti-oppression education work that uses agency and activism to create lasting and transformative pedagogical action. By drawing on both approaches we can build alternative discourses that challenge heterosexism and homophobia by disrupting their homogenizing discourses through the production of counter-hegemonic cultural texts. This can build a queer public pedagogy and a queering of anti-oppression education.
Chapter Two: Research Design

Critical Arts-based Participatory Action Research

For this research project I use an approach known as critical arts-based participatory action research. This is an evolving approach that draws on both participatory action research and critical arts-based research methods. I begin this chapter with a discussion of these two approaches and then explore how I bring them together through my research design. I discuss how our research team addressed critiques of participatory research practice and then explore participant selection and its limitations. Finally, I look at how the research team worked together to develop strategies for collaborative theorizing and how I have chosen to represent that collective analysis through this written account. I continue my discussion of methodology in Chapter 3 with an analysis of embodied learning and an in-depth look at the research process.

Participatory Action Research

As defined by Fine et al. (2004) “Participatory action research (PAR) represents a stance within qualitative research methods, an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action” (p. 95). This approach to research stems from the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose interest in learner-centered pedagogies, aimed to “promote dialogue, cultivate critical thinking and stimulate self-reflective action (praxis)” (Howley, 2010c, p. 183). Freire’s seminal/zygotic work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, has been used to situate emancipatory activities within a critical awareness raising framework. This process of conscientization aims to operate upon oppressive structures through self-reflective action (Freire, 1996). As a research method, PAR engages community members as researchers, recognizing that people are experts in their own lives, and as participants work to better understand how socio/political structures act upon their
bodies, they also build the capacity to transform those structures (Fine et al., 2004; Stoudt, 2007). What was unique about Freire’s approach when it emerged, was placing the learner, or in our case the participant, at the centre of the process, allowing the participant to lead the research, and the teacher/researcher to become the student. This co-intentionality is a key component to enabling democratic ownership of the research process (Preston, 2009).

At the heart of PAR is an intention to mobilize a process of change and transformation creating a legacy of inquiry through the usefulness of the research in the lives of participants (Fine et al., 2004; Kumashiro, 2002). By working with participants to analyze a situation, identify needs, and then acquire skills to address issues, participants are holding ownership over the research process and the resulting transformative practice (Dagron, 2009; Howley, 2010c). In this research project participants became a research team working not just to fulfill my curiosity as the researcher, but rather exploring and analyzing their own narratives, experiences, silences, and opportunities as they worked to make sense of the marginalizing effects and counter-hegemonic potentials of queer(ing) YouTube.

**Critical Arts-based Research**

Critical arts-based research is a postmodern, participative, and critical action oriented research methodology (Finley, 2008); an open approach with a willingness to invent and discover as you build your own methods (McNiff, 2008). My own critical arts-based approach is informed by qualitative research ideas found in performed ethnography (Goldstein, 2012a), embedded performed ethnography (Gullage, 2012), performative inquiry (Pelias, 2008), ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2008), applied theatre (Prentki, 2009), participatory video, and collective creation (Snell, 2013). However, given the fluidity of creative work, this research project engages a methodology that is in the process of becoming, a methodology that is cyclically
exploring the nature of knowing and unknowing through dialogic, reflexive and participatory embodied performance methods that stem from research-informed theatre.

Research-informed theatre is becoming an established form of research methodology (Ackroyd and O’Toole 2010, Goldstein 2012a, Saldaña 2005, 2011). In some approaches to research-informed theatre the process of theatre creation is used to deconstruct and understand the world around us (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Gray, 2009; Kaomea, 2003; Snyder-Young, 2010). The process of creation requires us to strip away our inhibitions in order to relate to the genuine humanity of those around us (Eisner, 2008). When paired with time for debrief and reflection, the creative process holds the potential for transforming our ways of knowing through critical analysis (Pelias, 2008). The creative process used in this research project had participants work collectively, tapping into their bodies as a resource, and cyclically exploring their stories viscerally and intellectually. “The artistic process gives shape and form to our experiences, an opportunity to explore, and an outlet in which to express” (Lederach, 2005, p. 34). Throughout this research project the creative space was used as a site of data collection and analysis as participants worked through a devising process to deconstruct and disrupt queer discourses on YouTube.

**Research Design and Data Analysis**

Using a participatory research-informed theatre methodology, the research methods unfolded organically from the participants throughout the research process. The specific methods and workshop description are described and analyzed in detail in Chapter 3. Here, a brief description of how the research design unfolded follows.

During a two day workshop participants identified dominant queer discourses by each bringing one YouTube video that they thought spoke to a dominant queer narrative. Participants
then deconstructed the videos through a cyclical process of watching the video, engaging in an embodied response to the video, and then having a reflective and analytical discussion about the video (embodied work as a deconstructive and analytical process is further discussed in Chapter 3). This deconstructive strategy engaged a queer lens as the research team used their bodies and minds to challenge heteronormative assumptions through which the video representations were constructed. The process defamiliarized the content through non-verbal and embodied work, offering alternative ways of thinking about the online material. This allowed participants to experience the videos first in their bodies, and then deepen that understanding by making sense of their visceral reactions through dialogue and reflection. The researcher/participants drew on their own overlapping identities, and their experiences in working through artistic processes to engage in pedagogically driven artistic work. The arts open up multiple ways of knowing (Eisner, 2008), they engage with our empathic bodies, creating meaning through a process of creative expression (McNiff, 2008). Arts-based research builds through discovery and creative invention the ability to unveil oppression and transform praxis (Finley, 2008). From this perspective, the research methodology employed here works to disrupt hierarchal approaches to research by engaging in a collaborative and creative approach through which we transform our ways of knowing (Lather, 1993). This research project worked from the understanding that knowledge is situated in-between people, their environments, and external power structures.

After watching and responding to all videos, participants were asked to individually identify: “What we didn’t see,” “What we loved,” “What we didn’t love,” “Representations,” “Ideas/Images provoked by the videos,” and to provide “Comments.” Individual responses were written on sticky notes and sorted onto flip chart paper on the wall. This process not only summarized our discoveries, it gave participants an opportunity to code our discussions
themselves which I later used as a point of triangulation and member checking as I worked to (re)present the collective analysis in this written account (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

After coding our discussions, participants were encouraged to respond to what they saw. What provoked them when they thought about the way queerness was represented in the videos? This led once more to an embodied spiral of analysis with each participant creating a short individual performance response piece. The response pieces were also followed by reflection and discussion.

On the second day of the workshop, participants were asked to bring a unique personal story and artifact to share with the group. It was through these narratives that the research team built a creative video in which they attempted to disrupt and transform the online stereotypes and representations, identified earlier in the workshop. The creative process provided insight into ideas of representation, queerness, storytelling, and community building (discussed in Chapter 3).

Ten days after the workshop, participants met to debrief their experience. In this two hour session, participants were guided through a group reflection method called focused conversation (Stanfield, 2000). This debrief session gave participants an opportunity to further engage in the analysis of our workshop by answering and discussing questions such as:

1. What happened? What did we do? Describe the process from the beginning to end?

2. What was it like for you? What was your experience? (surprises, frustrations, challenges, exciting) What were the key turning points for you, if any? (Creatively, personally, intellectually, emotionally)

3. What did we learn? Why does what we did matter?

As a focused conversation technique, these questions guided the group discussion from objective level thinking, where we collected the facts by outlining what we had done step-by-step; to reflective level thinking, where we worked to understand our experiences and how we felt about them; to analytical/interpretive level thinking, where we explored why our work matters drawing connections from our personal reflections to wider social structures and discourses; and finally to decisional level thinking, where we looked at where this research was guiding us in our own artistic and political futures (Stanfield, 2000). This debriefing process provided the research team an opportunity to make connections across the entire workshop experience as we shifted from the personal, to the political, and back again. The guided discussion analyzed the research process and offered new insights into the implications of the research. This session was a key component of the collective analysis and collaborative theorizing and was later used as an important validity framework when analyzing the data from the workshop (Creswell, 2013).

With permission from the participants, the weekend workshop and debrief session were recorded on video and later transcribed in full. At the end of the first day we ran into technical issues with the video camera. Therefore, to ensure accurate and participatory documentation of our work, three members of the research team spent time collectively writing field notes. I then used thematic coding (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011) on the entire data set and in sticking to the participatory nature of the research, one participant who was previously trained in qualitative research volunteered to thematically code the transcripts as a secondary coder. Kvale (1996) believes that multiple interpreters helps control for haphazard analysis and should be used more often for interpretation of deeper meaning, in turn increasing “coder reliability” (p. 208). As a potential strategy, it was determined that in reconciling the two sets of codes, any conflicts
would be taken to the entire research team to determine the more accurate analysis. This turned out to be unnecessary as the embedded collective analysis work that occurred during the workshop provided a very solid analysis structure and conflicting codes did not emerge.

Once the two sets of codes had been reconciled the codes were analyzed for themes, connections, points of disagreement and emerging stories (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Specifically I looked for how the participants engaged in the creative process to enhance their own learning; key moments, if any, in which participants began to reflect upon and question or reconsider their own stances on the issues we were exploring; and the discourses that participants found provoking or problematic across our various points of inquiry. This analysis provided insight into the research questions listed in Chapter 1, determining how the artistic process transformed participant understandings of queerness in popular culture (Question 1 & 4) and which aspects of our work together provoked participants to transform and disrupt dominant discourses (Question 2 & 3). I then looked for silences or absences; what was unspoken in our group process and analysis? This was done through both the embodied analysis, the group analysis work, the debrief session, and finally in the transcript analysis. The multimodal analysis was important because it provided different ways of looking at the data; creating space for subtextual understandings to come to light. What emerged was an analysis into the creative process as a site of data collection and analysis (Chapter 3) and the identification, deconstruction and disruption of dominant queer discourses available on YouTube (Chapter 4). A draft of this written account was then shared with all participants to ensure that the analysis and descriptions written here are representative of our collective experiences.
Troubling Participation

In my research design, it was my intention to engage in a highly participatory research project, where knowledge was constructed through collaborative analysis (Kumashiro, 2002; Stoudt, 2007). Like all research methods PAR opens up certain ways of knowing while closing off others. Jordan (2008) believes that, “although the fact of participation in a research project may be compatible with Western values of empowerment, liberation, and democracy, it may also be equally bound to technologies of normalization, focused on subjugation, control, and exploitation” (p. 6-7). All too often, barriers to participation are overlooked. These barriers exist within power relations, competing ideologies, and project agendas, along with lived realities of potential participants (Preston, 2009). Participation is a complex undertaking that can be inclusive or exclusive, that can reinforce hegemony or counter it (Kafewo, 2009). Navigating these barriers can be challenging, and the solution will be dependent on the situation within which a project is taking place (Savdie & Chetley, 2009).

In thinking about these potential limitations and barriers, I worked alongside researcher/participants to navigate shared knowledge production within a collaborative environment. Together we built a community of researchers with shared skills, respect and trust (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Fine et al. 2004). We agreed to respectfully disagree, knowing that our goal of working collaboratively was not consensus, but rather new insights. Our process was guided by the following notions of shared inquiry:

1. Reflexive practice: Together the research team worked from a place of humility, critically assessing our positions and privileges, negotiating what we did and didn’t know based on our own experiences (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012);
2. Shared ownership: The research team took turns leading activities and discussions, ensuring space and opportunity for all researchers to hold ownership over the creative and research processes (Preston, 2009). This approach meant that the research was of value for each of the participants involved (Kumashiro, 2002);

3. Diversity: Through personal narratives and unique opinions we inhabited the uncomfortable and dissonant opinions between us, delving into the process of creation and uncovering what is too often dismissed or unspoken;

4. Challenging truth and neutrality: We worked from the understanding that research and researchers cannot be neutral in the research process (Lather, 1986), and that we were not searching for an ultimate truth, but rather to reveal the contradictions and complexities inherent in our inquiry (Dillard, 2000; Gullage, 2012; Lather, 1986);

5. Collaboration: Working through collective creation, the research team navigated and negotiated group dynamics and individual points of interest and inquiry. Our process was dialogical and interactive (Kumashiro, 2002).

Through these reflexive approaches and using the body as a tool of cognitive, affective and intuitive knowing (Pelias, 2008), the research team built critical reflection about what the body knows. Therefore, we were able to build critical thought about arts-based research (Finley, 2008), and find ways to increase the validity of emancipatory pedagogical goals within applied arts practice without resorting to reinforcing the status quo.

To conclude this discussion on research design, Kumashiro (2002) states “Every kind of methodology makes certain kinds of interactions, knowledges, and changes possible and others impossible. My methodology is not the ‘best’ methodology, but simply a methodology that closely fits the goals of my project” (p. 17). The methodology I discuss here fits the goals of this
project as it shifted and evolved from moment to moment in an ever evolving process of collaborative knowledge production.

Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through an email invitation in which I stated that I was “looking for five queer-identified theatre artists who [were] interested in exploring the relationship between theatre, media, and public pedagogy within a queer discursive space” (P. Snell, email communication, June 3, 2013). I was willing to negotiate the number of participants, but hoped to work with approximately five in order to achieve both breadth and depth. Working with five participants meant that the research team was large enough to be a group, yet small enough to negotiate collective creation work, group discussions, and give each person shared ownership over the process and research. I sent the email out through my personal and professional networks and included an invitation asking potential participants to forward my email to others who might be interested in being involved - a snowball recruitment technique (Glesne, 2011, p. 45). This arms-length approach gave participants an opportunity to think about their decision before agreeing to participate. Interested participants contacted me with questions and concerns. In the week leading up to the workshop I had nine people interested in participating. But as the date approached four participants withdrew due to other commitments: two were required to attend Father’s Day events with their families, one was in the process of moving and the other was behind on script memorization for the following Monday. This meant that I would be working alongside five participants.

My recruitment called for two identifiers in my participants (1) that they self identified as queer and (2) that they were theatre artists. The reasons for this are multi-fold. I wanted to work with individuals who identified on the queer spectrum because (a) I wanted participants to
have an understanding of queer stereotypes and queer realities; (b) I wanted participants to be able to draw on their personal queer narratives as we moved into the creative work, and (c) I wanted to engage in a discourse from the margins.

I wanted to work with theatre artists for several reasons. First, I wanted to use embodied analysis work; I believe everyone is capable of using their bodies as a site of learning, however, theatre artists have many years of training and have developed the tools to allow their bodies to speak freely. Second, I wanted people who would be able to leave their inhibitions at the door and dive into the creative work without having to spend additional time building towards trusting their bodies. Theatre artists are intimately familiar and comfortable with the types of exercises I was planning on using to engage the group. Third, I wanted to work with theatre artists through the process of collective creation. Theatre is inherently a collaborative art form and an art form that has the ability to encompass many other creative forms (music, movement, etc.); as a result, theatre artists are comfortable working collaboratively and creating interdisciplinary work, these skill sets would deepen the ability of using collective creation to collect and analyze data. Fourth, an artist’s eye is trained to critique art, therefore when deconstructing the videos theatre artists would be able to critique both form and content.

Beyond identifying as queer and a theatre artist I left my call open. This was done intentionally in hopes that I would attract a diverse group with different perspectives and experiences. The final group of five participants was diverse in their queer identities, gender identities, ethnic and racial backgrounds, aboriginal status, and age.

**Limitations of Recruitment and Participant Selection**

Although I had not specifically recruited participants that had attended post-secondary educational institutions, the research team was comprised of individuals who had engaged with
advanced schooling. This meant that all participants were able to quickly engage in critical

thought surrounding our topic of study, but it also meant that the analysis and responses that

emerged during our time together were skewed towards an intellectualized discourse that may

not be representative of all YouTube consumers. Given the small queer theatre community in

Toronto and my personalized recruitment techniques, many participants knew each other prior

to the workshop; personal relationships were declared at the outset of the workshop and the

group quickly moved to building a professional community where prior relationships did not

seem to interfere with the work. Given a bigger group this may have been more difficult to

navigate, but with a group of six individuals (five participants and myself), there was no room

for fractions or groupings, allowing us to all come together as one community. An interesting

concept for thinking about the limitations of my recruitment techniques is that of Filter Bubbles

(Pariser, 2011). Filter bubbles are often used to describe the computerized logarithms that
determine who and what we see on social media and the internet, but can also be applied to who
we interact with on a daily basis. In terms of my recruitment techniques, the call went to people
within my filter bubble, people who in all likelihood agreed with me. This meant that people
who responded and were interested in the subject of the research project likely shared similar
values and ideas.

Confounding Roles

During the workshop I moved between roles of facilitator, participant, and researcher.

This confounding of roles throughout the weekend meant that I was never able to be fully

invested in any given role since my actions, thoughts, and focus were often split. In the role of

facilitator I operated as a guide, leading the group through a process, which at times required me
to step in as a participant. In pairing or sharing exercises taking on the role of participant led to
equalizing the power that I held in my other two roles. I didn’t ask the participants to do or share anything that I myself wouldn’t also do or share. At times participants would also take on the role of facilitator, leading activities or discussions. In my role as researcher I was watching, observing, and at times silencing myself in order to provide space for the thoughts and opinions of the participants to emerge. Navigating these roles proved trickier than I had anticipated. As a facilitator I wanted to keep us focused and on track, as a participant I wanted to contribute and engage, and as a researcher I wanted to be aware of my data and research goals.

Although challenging, this confounding of roles allowed me to experience the work from a number of different positions, providing a deeper analysis of (a) the experience of participants, (b) the impact of the embodied work, and (c) the shared ownership of both the research and creative work that emerged over the course of the workshop. For example, I analyzed our work from a place of vulnerability having shared my own personal narratives rather than from a place of objective and distanced observation. During the workshop I moved between witness and performer and was therefore able to analyze our embodied work through both my own visceral responses to the videos, but also how I saw those same discourses operate on the bodies of participants. Finally, by providing participants the space to lead the research and creative work, the workshop went in unexpected directions deepening the analysis beyond that of a single researcher.

**Form and Representation**

As I made the shift from participatory collective exploration and analysis to the solitary work of writing, I quickly began to feel the tension between collaborative embodied learning and the written representation of that experience. It is not possible to capture here the energy and creativity of what transpired in the time the research team spent together, and by attempting
to do so I am sharing a singular interpretation of that moment, despite the efforts at participatory research. Therefore I have chosen to intersperse into the analysis, vignettes and descriptions of our creative work. The narrative account presented here is one way of representing the data. It is the story that I am choosing to tell. The vignettes and performance descriptions provide readers with a way of engaging with an emotional and visceral analysis of the workshop. I hope these vignettes will operate as an interruption to the written narrative, which is the dominant way of representing research, noting that these short embodied vignettes also tell a story (Cole, 2002; Gray, 2009). At times the vignettes will layer and complicate the narrative account and at others they will stand un-contextualized, a representation and analysis of the research findings in and of themselves.

Ellsworth (2005) draws on documentary film practice as a writing format, where she “juxtapose[s], complicate[s], and creatively mate[s] … source material” to create new meanings as the texts speak to one another. As a filmmaker and artist this makes sense to me, knowing that how we arrange elements will work to deepen and construct our interpretation of that material. In the way that I assemble the materials of this research project (narrative account, data, vignettes, etc.,) I am presenting a story in the liminal space between the texts and their representations. It is not my goal to provide the reader with complete and fixed answers to my research questions, but rather to open up a conversation exploring a cyclical process of creation, discourse, and power as it acts on and moves between the researchers and their bodies in a perpetual state of becoming.

Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated how critical arts-based participatory action research approaches informed the research design of this project. I explored the guiding principles
established by the research team for collaborative theorizing and discussed participant
recruitment, limitations, and confounding roles. In the next chapter I engage deeply with an
analysis of embodied learning, using examples from the workshop to specifically address the
research methods, their intended purpose, and their resulting impact on participant experience,
data collection, and data analysis.
Chapter Three: Embodied Knowing and Creative Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter I will be moving back and forth between the description of our workshop and an analysis of our research process. I will share the activities that we engaged in, the rationale behind each activity, and then the collective analysis and response from participant researchers. This chapter will deeply explore ideas of embodied knowing and research-informed theatre.

Day One

As mentioned earlier, the data collection unfolded over the course of a two day workshop. Six queer-identified theatre artists (five participants and myself) came together on a Saturday morning in June 2013. Each participant came prepared to share a YouTube video and with an interest in exploring dominant queer representations on the internet. Some participants knew each other while others did not know anyone in the room (participant recruitment is discussed in Chapter 2). The day started off as many workshops do; we introduced ourselves by answering the question: Who are you and what do you do? In point form here is how participants described themselves:

Tegan⁵ - BFA in theatre, worked as director/actor in Montreal, moved to Toronto and took a theatrical sabbatical, just getting back into theatre in the past six months.

Liz - Studied at Concordia and the Centre for Indigenous Theatre, does collective creation, works with Clay and Paper Theatre and Jumblies Theatre, does art and music, currently trying to finish writing plays.

Laura - Works and teaches anti-oppression education at OISE, specializing in anti-homophobia education, is a playwright, has a focus on research-informed theatre.

⁵ Names have been changed to protect the identity of participants.
Pam - Student at OISE, program coordinator at Charles Street Video, background in theatre, recently moved into media and video, has a focus on community art and art education. Research interests: How do we combine theatre and video? How is media used as an educational tool?

Maria - Background in theatre, then therapy. Is interested in the process of theatre as a way to tell stories and creative ways for people to work through stuff. MA in drama therapy, now works with children and play therapy. Does therapeutic clowning. Excited about getting into collective creation process. Facilitator for Queer Connections youth video dialogue project on YouTube.

Ben - Theatre school reject, now a theatre director. Runs a theatre company that raises money for an orphanage in Ghana. Starting sexualities degree at York in the Fall. Diploma of community work from George Brown. Works at MP Craig Scott’s office. (Field Notes, June 15, 2013)

Introductions were followed by a description of how I arrived at this research project (as outlined in detail in Chapter 1) and an explanation of some of the questions and goals that we would be exploring over the course of the workshop. I presented the following questions and points of inquiry:

How are online spaces and YouTube influencing us? What are the conversations and discourses that are happening [online]? Who is being represented [on YouTube] and who is not? … As someone who is searching for something to connect to [online] what is the dominant understanding [of queerness] that they are encountering and how does that get integrated into our own understandings of self?

… I am also interested … in saying: what are the processes we can use? How can we actually use the creative work to do the analysis for us? … What happens in that [creative] response work, do we reinforce some of the same [dominant] ideas, or are we challenging them and disrupting them? And I don’t know what the answer to that is going to be.

… We will start with the stimulus of the [YouTube] videos … and then see what happens. This is our major goal for the weekend (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013).

The discussion then flowed into a brief group contract where everyone agreed to honour one another’s differing experiences and understandings by agreeing to respectfully disagree as we speak for ourselves and from our own lived experiences. Laura felt it was important to note
generational difference stating that she was “not a YouTube person” and that different “cultural references might come up” (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013). She concluded that this would hopefully be interesting and Ben agreed that it was important to have different generations present and connected. Finally our initial discussion finished with a description of participatory action research where I reminded the group that we were working together as researchers. I encouraged everyone to “take the lead at any point,” to feel free to “try things out,” and noted that we would be doing collective analysis work.

**Pair and Share**

In the first activity of the workshop, participants were asked to get into pairs and discuss a specific question. After each question new pairs were formed. There were five questions allowing everyone to have at least one short conversation with everyone else. The discussion topics were as follows:

Tell your partner about...
- your favourite place you have ever travelled;
- your first Pride experience, or why you have never been to Pride⁶;
- the first play you were involved in;
- how you ended up in Toronto? What was your journey to Toronto?;
- a time that you felt invisible. (Field Notes, June 15 2013)

The questions were designed to have people connect through their stories and experiences, bringing in topics relevant to the work we were doing together (example: Pride or theatre), but also to avoid the small talk that often infiltrates our first conversations with strangers. I wanted to avoid small talk because we had a very short time together and therefore needed to quickly move towards intimate and personal connections, and these short conversations allowed us to do that. As Ben put it “those were really interesting and layered questions”. It was my hope that this

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⁶ Pride is a queer cultural festival that works to celebrate and affirm queer identities. Pride festivals occur around the world and work to build community, raise awareness and visibility, and engage in political and advocacy work.
initial ice breaker activity would allow for people to expose a piece of themselves without being thrown into a place of vulnerability. When we sat down to do a debrief of the workshop, this activity was deemed very important in helping to quickly create a collective, to share something personal, to connect with every other person in the room, and to begin to dive right into identity work.

Warm Up - Day One

Liz led the first warm up activity, called Kevin’s Game and described it as a “name vocalization concentration game”. The game allowed the group to connect with our bodies as we moved about the room, made eye contact with one another, and learned each other’s names. I then lead two activities, a playful fill the spaces running game and a movement mirror transformation game, both of which physically warmed us up, but also got us to connect with our bodies, allowing our bodies to speak as we shifted organically and without thought from one movement to another.

Moving Sculptures: Using Embodiment as a Deconstructive Analysis Tool

There has been much written about the body as a site of knowing (Eisner, 2008; Gray, 2009; Gullage, 2012; Pelias, 2008; Snyder-Young, 2010). In particular, Pelias (2008) discusses the body as an exploratory instrument where the body can be empathetic, participatory, and political as it builds knowledge through affective and intuitive understandings. Pelias (2008) claims that the body is not a neutral site, but rather a contested site where the body of the performer learns by doing and builds empathy through recognizing differing points of view. Therefore, by engaging in embodied expressions of learning and knowing we are working through multiple forms of knowledge production (Eisner, 2008), where we can respond to the
unexpected (McNiff, 2008), and reflect, contrast, comment on and interpret source material (Rossiter et al., 2008).

Knowing that we would be using embodied analysis as an initial response to the YouTube videos, it was important that we practiced connecting with our impulses and allowing them to move through our bodies and voices. I chose what I call a *moving sculpture* as the container for our embodied responses. Unlike sculpture activities that depict a frozen picture or tableau (Boal, 2002; Emunah, 1994), a moving sculpture allows for a more dynamic reaction through a repetitive sound and movement. Drawing on what Baer (2008) calls a “reflection response sculpt” which she describes as “an embodied response facilitated by each group member attuning to their own internal impulse and emotions, and then translating that into a sound, movement, word or phrase,” the moving sculpture begins with a single actor following an impulse provoked by a story or video. Actor 1 enters the playing space and follows their impulse until they land on a repeated sound and movement; other actors then join the sculpture or picture with their own impulses in relation to Actor 1, providing commentary, support, contradiction, or simply operating in a parallel sound and movement. As new actors join the image the differing responses create a reflection on, and analysis of, the source material. The key to moving sculptures is in allowing the impulse to move through your body without thinking, trusting that your body will be able to perform its response. Here is an example of a moving sculpture created in response to the video “Lizzy the Lezzy”; Lizzy is an animated stand-up comedian who discusses being an out and proud lesbian (Lizzy the Lezzy, 2010).

**Vignette #1.**

Actor 1 stands centre stage. Neutral.

“Muff muncher.”

Repeat.
Actor 2 circles Actor 1. Stomping around with big strides, hands swing in a wide movement taking up lots of space. Voice is gruff and loud. “Pussy crunching muff munching muff muncher.” Repeat.

Actor 3 peaks out from behind Actor 1. Embarrassed. “I hope my mom and dad don’t see this.” Repeat.


Actor 5 stands awkwardly to the side swinging arms, swaying body.

As a deconstructive analysis technique, this process of embodiment allowed the research team to acknowledge the constructedness of meaning and identity within the online videos (Sullivan, 2003). Poststructuralist education researcher, Kaomea (2003) believes that:

art and literature … force us to slow down our perception, to linger, and to notice. Because our everyday perception is usually too automatic, art and literature employ a variety of defamiliarizing techniques to prolong our perception, attract and hold our attention, and make us look at a familiar object or text with an exceptionally high level of awareness. (p. 15)

In the above vignette, this occurred through the juxtaposition of pride and shame, and the repetition of the term “muff muncher.” These performative moments worked to defamiliarize the content of the videos and by doing so this vignette opened up space to further explore ideas of voice, silence, privilege, and fear (discussed in Chapter 4).

The embodied deconstructive process enabled the research team to imagine alternative ways of thinking about the online videos and how their representations act upon, and are produced by, social discourses (Kaomea, 2003; Snyder-Young, 2010; Sullivan, 2003). Through embodied responses, and through the framework of moving sculptures, the research team drew on a number of deconstructive theatrical techniques: depicting multiple perspectives, engaging
theatricality through movement and image, little reliance on words, opening up spaces of unknowing, ending with questions, repetition, juxtaposition, spontaneity, improvisation, witnessing, physicalization, and finally, vulnerability and empathy. The research team allowed the videos to act on their bodies and the result was a unique and powerful deconstructive process that was not bound by the limits of our minds.

24 Hour Stories

It was important that as a performance collective and research team we learned and practiced the moving sculpture technique before moving on to analyze the videos (Pelias, 2008). I asked each person to tell a story from the last 24 hours; it didn’t have to be profound, but rather an expression of the mundane, the everyday. We would then respond to each person’s story using and practicing the moving sculpture analysis technique. What emerged from this activity was an overwhelming sense of validation. As people saw their stories reflected back to them through the moving sculptures they said, “That is exactly how it felt,” “That is totally it,” “That is exactly how it was, I was you, that was Marie,” and “Thank you.” The mundane stories from the past 24 hours had been witnessed and heard (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013).

The 24 hour story activity had been meant as a tool to practice the moving sculpture technique before analyzing the online videos, like Lizzy the Lezzy, but in the debrief session, which occurred ten days after the workshop, participants expressed a strong connection to the activity, claiming that it helped build community, comfort, and connection amongst researchers by learning about one another, and validating each other’s stories. In the transcript excerpt below, Ben and Maria both offer insights into the importance of the 24 hour story activity in our collective process.
Ben:
I also think that it means … there might have been a different level of comfort with throwing out why we brought that video and what are our reasons for our responses to that video, what frustrates us about that video. ‘Cause then you have no sense of really who these people are and can I offend them if I talk about this, or is it troubling to bring up …

Maria:
mhmmm

Ben:
…this point of view, um or, you know, am I the only one that thinks that and I am going to just be like, whatever, um, … then you are more willing to put that out there because you are a little more comfortable with the group that may… say I have never thought of that, but it won’t be (sarcasm), “oh I have never thought of that,” it will be (thoughtful), “oh I have never thought of that, what, like, tell me more about that cause that is really interesting.”

Liz:
mhmmm.

Laura:
And you think that is because we collectively had the uh, embodied kinda activity that we did together?

Ben:
I think it is because of like, we spent the time together, I think what we were doing was continually driving ourselves forward towards what we put together, um, you know, talk and get to know each other, practice a little bit, warm up, let’s practice it a little bit, let’s do some analysis and then lets come back to a discussion and then lets…

Maria:
mmmmhmmm.

Ben:
physicalize it.

Maria:
yep.

…

Maria:
mhmmm, and I think that in terms of being able to set a tone to be able to respond in our bodies and being able to have that openness with one another, we were really … It’s a
silly thing the last 24 hours, but you could choose anything from your last 24 hours and you were giving it to the rest of us to respond to it in some way and I think that we felt really validated by the others. Like, showing us a part of it that maybe we hadn’t thought of, or, even, like in that type of microcosm right? Or showing us, ohmygosh, that is EXACTLY how I felt.

Laura:
Yeah.

Maria:
So you are connecting and you are also seeing things that you didn’t see. So it is like the beginning of that sort of uh way of responding and working as a collective. (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)

The transcript excerpt above shows the research team as they came to understand their experience in the 24 hour story activity. It was important because it allowed participants to get to know each other on a different level, an embodied level. Without using words participants were able to honour and respect each other’s experiences. When Ben says “then you are more willing to put that out there because you are a little more comfortable with the group that may … say I have never thought of that, but it won’t be (sarcasm), ‘oh I have never thought of that’ it will be (thoughtful), ‘oh I have never thought of that, what, like, tell me more about that cause that is really interesting’” (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013), he is discussing the shedding of inhibition that came along with the 24 hour story activity and the practicing of the moving sculptures. Taking the time to foster a collective that was respectful and receptive meant that the video analysis work was less guarded, providing a deeper and more insightful analysis as the research team felt comfortable to follow their impulses free of judgement. The deliberate movement between talk, storytelling, embodiment, and analysis allowed for the research team to connect with different ways of knowing, in learning about each other and about the videos we were about to watch.
Chapter 4 goes into detail about the video analysis and research findings. What I would like to discuss here is the process that unfolded to arrive at the findings presented in Chapter 4. In our analysis of the videos we moved through a process where (a) we watched a video, (b) without talking moved to the playing space and created a moving sculpture as a response to the video, as described above, and then (c) sat down to discuss and analyze our movements and the video before starting again with the next video. This process allowed us to connect with our impulses before intellectualizing what we had seen. We could manifest our visceral reactions before attempting to formulate words. Furthermore, by responding first with our bodies and then with our words we were able to use the embodied response as our first point of analysis. Pelias (2008) suggests that understanding our embodied responses requires critical reflection and reflexivity. This meant that our discussions often began with an analysis of the embodied response which we then tied back to what we had seen in the video. This created a very deep and complex understanding of both the embodied work and the videos themselves. For example, in response to the first video: “Elvira Kurt clip from We’re Funny That Way” (bruceintoronto, 2009), in which, Kurt discusses coming out to her mother and her mother’s response; Laura began the discussion as follows:

I needed acceptance, Liz kept moving away, and it felt like a dance, and it really is a dance, it felt like it was going to go on forever, [I needed] stamina. (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

Laura is referencing the movements that arose during the embodied response where Liz kept moving away and ignoring Laura’s pleas for acceptance. This was the first time that Laura connected to the metaphor of stamina, which was used in the YouTube video she brought to
share. She returned to the idea of stamina throughout the workshop and in the debrief session

Laura said:

…I think it um gets connected to my incredible attachment to the idea of stamina, of all the things I ended up taking away, um, that whole idea of needing stamina, and uh, I even embodied it in the uh running [scenario], and uh and sometimes you get tired right, and uh, it was a moment to remind yourself, well yeah, it is never going to end and you need stamina and this is the work for the rest of your life. So I think that is where I ended up. So then the question becomes for me, like my big take away is, what do you need to keep up your stamina? And how are you going to do that? (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)

Laura moved through a process that started with a stand-up comedian making a joke about the stamina her mother needs to maintain the homophobia she directs at her, then through to a visceral understanding that homophobic stamina needs to be matched with the opposing force of anti-homophobia which also requires stamina. Finally she took it further by looking to her own life and work by asking, what support systems do I need to continue to fight against homophobia? The analytical process provided a forum for us to move from the cultural to the personal and back again, understanding how the implications of discourses in popular culture impact our personal understandings of self and self in relation to other/culture. The process also connected our workshop activity to our cultural, creative, and activist work.

**Embodied Analysis**

In response to a video entitled “Dear Straight People” (Button Poetry, 2013), where Denice Frohman presents a spoken word poem addressing straight privilege and queer marginalization, the following moving sculpture was created by the research team. The team worked through their impulses to build this moment of analysis. Here we see, not what the video said, but how it acted on our bodies, and in turn how we are able to draw some interesting and specific insights.
Vignette #2.

Actor 1 stands centre stage pulling hair and screaming continually.
“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.”
Repeat.

Actor 2 puts an arm around Actor 1 in a comforting embrace while simultaneously looking backwards to see if someone is watching.
Repeat.

Actor 3 seems to be trying to say something, grasping for words, but no sound is coming out.
Hands try to spur momentum to speak.
“Ah.”
Repeat.

Actor 4 sits beside Actor 3.
Leans in and softly says:
“I am here for you.”
Repeat.

The above vignette highlights how moments of analysis unfolded during the moving sculptures. In this example we can see oppression, silence, frustration, allies, internalized homophobia, and fear manifesting in a single repetitive embodied image. The research team was able to act upon their impulses and find the underlying discourses inherent in the original video by allowing those discourses to act upon our bodies (embodiment as a deconstructive technique is discussed above). By using the moving sculpture technique as a point of analysis for each of the videos that we watched the research team was able to understand the subtextual meanings within the content of the videos. Applied theatre practitioner Dani Snyder-Young (2010) believes that, “kinaesthetic knowledge, experienced in the gut, can provide the possibility of radical transformation - of real changes of perspective and real shifts in understanding” (p. 887). The research team experienced these changes and shifts as the embodied analysis work complicated and challenged our initial ideas. The multi-site approach to analysis (embodiment, reflection,
discussion) enabled the research team to create a full picture of dominant queer discourses on YouTube, which I will continue to unravel in Chapter 4.

Coding the Data and the Benefits of Silent Reflection

The next level of collective analysis came when I asked each person to reflect on the discussions that had stemmed from the videos. I gave everyone a stack of sticky notes and a marker, and put flip chart paper with the following headings on the wall: “What we didn’t see. What we loved. What we didn’t love. Representations. Images/Ideas. Questions. Comments.” The group worked silently as they sorted notes and reflections into the different categories, pausing to think about what had already been written and what needed to be added. This process had a number of purposes: (1) it operated as an initial analytical code to our discussions; (2) it provided deeper reflection on what we had witnessed and not witnessed in the videos and what that meant; (3) it created an opportunity to draw connections across categories and through the data that was now represented on the wall; (4) it was a form of collective analysis and theorizing; and (5) it gave us a point of provocation to move into our next activity and creative work.

Individual Performances

As we moved into our last activity of the first day, I asked each person to review the wall of notes in its entirety and to find something that provoked them. I said:

Find a phrase or an image that provokes something in you, whether that resonates or challenges you. What is that phrase or image? Is it from the board, videos, embodied responses? Take a minute and identify that.

Pause. Several minutes silent work.

We are going to take one or two ideas and start to create pieces in response to that. What I want you to do with your [provoking] phrase or image… is to spend 5 minutes and think about what is it about that [phrase or image] that is provoking? Is it relating to
something in your own history, is it something that makes you mad, is it something that makes you glad? What is it about it?

Pause. Several minutes silent work.

Identify two themes that you have been writing about that seem to be really prominent.

Pause. Several minutes silent work.

Once you have your themes, I want you to come up with an embodied image to represent those themes and then you are going to share with us how you arrived at that image. Then we will identify any common themes, if there are any, and where we want to go next. (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

Each person then presented a short individual piece. These short snapshots further complicated our initial analysis by cycling once again into an embodied knowing.

**Ben: White men.**

Ben felt provoked by the notion of white men. He said: “They are always there, always taking up space. They are everywhere. Always represented” (Field Notes, June 15, 2013). His performance had him move in and out of our personal space with a penetrating invasive gaze. He portrayed a sense of entitlement as he undressed us with his eyes and words. We had already identified whiteness as a key component of the dominant representations of queerness (as further discussed in Chapter 4), but by embodying the privilege and prevalence of whiteness we were able to viscerally understand how this discourse acts upon our ideas, our actions, our institutions, and our bodies. As audience members we sat there helplessly as Ben played a role that invaded and took away our personal space.

**Maria: Dream come true.**

Maria was provoked by the sarcastic statement of “a dream come true” in reference to one’s sexuality. Maria worked through a fairy tale theme asking, “what is a queer princess?” (Field Notes, June 15, 2013). Her performance morphed and reclaimed a traditional
tale of a prince in shining armour to that of a princess. In her performance, she explored how representations of heteronormativity are present in popular culture from a very young age. She began with the familiar tale of “Once Upon a Time” and then with the noise of a scratched record screeching to a halt she began again with characters that challenged that traditional tale and its gender binaries. Her work was an embodied representation of the reclaiming, reframing, and resistance work that could be done by re-engaging popular culture.

**Liz: Happy sex.**

Liz was provoked by the notion of “happy sex.” Liz had her arms and legs spread widely, she moved about the room as if she was holding onto a giant ball. A huge smile was plastered across her face. In her attempt to embody happy sex she came to realize that she had no idea what happy sex looked like. In debriefing she said, “It is not something we see in popular culture, not in queer culture anyway.” Furthermore, Liz asked pointedly: “What is happy sex and what do people do after happy sex” (Field Notes, June 15, 2013)? This performance and ensuing questions directly engaged with negative portrayals of sex and sexuality in popular culture. In the case of the videos we had just watched there was an absence of sex, it was unspoken, hidden, or missing (see Chapter 4). In an attempt to understand what happy sex looked like we were reminded that we did not have many positive sexual representations available to us.

**Tegan: “I see you. Yay! You are normal!”**

Tegan was provoked by the witnessing and validation of “normal” that takes place in popular culture. Tegan stood in the middle of the room looking each person in the eye and saying simply “yes.” In discussion this performance was to highlight that “yes” is in direct contrast to “no.” She was saying yes to community, to difference, to being unique and to being
queer. Positivity was lacking in the work that we saw, and this performance stood to disrupt stories of negativity that seem to dominate queer representations.

**Laura: “They both need stamina.”**

Laura was provoked by the notion of stamina. Laura asked Tegan to perform with her. Both performers stood on stage and began a light jog, as they continued the breathing got harder, more difficult and more forced until they came to a stop and looked at one another. This performance represented the relationship and connection between homophobia and anti-homophobia and reinforced that they are forever working in tandem with one another. Both Tegan and Laura need stamina to continue to run along side each other, to feed these opposing forces.

All of these individual performances demonstrate the innate ability of artistic expression to work as a mode of disruption to the heteronormative status quo. Through the embodied analysis of the videos, these performer researchers were able to offer a concrete performative response, all of which worked to challenge what we had witnessed in the online videos. Drawing from the cue of what provokes you, these performances provided further insight by continuing to highlight the silenced or unspoken representations of the popular videos. Here the creation work, just like the deconstruction work, provided insight into the analysis of online discourses and representations.

**Day One Summary**

The first day of our workshop saw the group develop a collective, and then identify and deconstruct dominant queer discourses on YouTube through a technique I am calling *moving sculptures*. The methods that we engaged were varied, as were our responses. The research team worked through a process of analysis that involved embodiment, collective analysis, discussion,
reflection, and performance. These varying sites of knowledge creation provided a deep understanding of dominant queer representations on YouTube and the relationship of the research team to those marginalizing representations. This provided a foundation for the work that was to take place on the second day of the workshop where we moved into personal narrative and collective responses.

**Warm Up: Day Two**

The group came together on the second day and Maria led a warm up entitled “Repeat after Maria.” The exercise concept was quite simple, the group stood in a circle and repeated after Maria, mirroring both her intonation and her body movements. The resulting activity was very powerful playing with both themes and delivery. For example, Maria began with a fairly generic “Hi” and the group repeated “Hi.” Continuing to use variations of “Hi” and “Hello,” Maria led the group through a series of emotions from excited greetings to dismissive or indifferent greetings, changing the intonation and body language with each repetition. The exercise follows impulse as it shifts between language, body and emotion. Maria eventually began to bring the themes from the day before into the exercise as she played with phrases such as “That’s so gay,” ranging from flippant to angry to disgusted, and then words taken directly from the videos “Bitch, fierce.” or “Muff muncher.” How do these words and phrases take on different meanings as we embody them in different ways? Something celebratory or mundane can quickly become aggressive when paired with a different gesture or vocal interpretation. This is a common exercise in acting classes because it plays with delivery, warms up your voice and body, and explores the importance of understanding subtext. In our case it went further by reconnecting the group with the work from the day before and allowing the words, ideas, and themes we had been working with to circulate between us and through us.
Personal Narratives

On our second day together the process shifted from trying to understand and identify how discourse manifests in representations on YouTube, to working with our own stories. I had asked each participant to bring an artifact that spoke to their unique queer narrative. In a storytelling circle we each took a few moments to share our artifacts and stories. I wanted us to investigate how our own narratives stood in contrast to what we had witnessed and analyzed on YouTube. The second day of the workshop was focused on creating a response video, a counter-hegemonic text to disrupt dominant discourses, and I was curious to know if our own stories would be the catalyst for this creation work. Sharing our personal stories was an extremely powerful moment in our collective process. As a group we began to understand the intimate connections between each of us, and the ways our narratives overlapped and yet were each unique and complex. Through storytelling we built empathy amongst ourselves and came to better understand one another (Eisner, 2008). They were not our most dramatic stories, but rather stories that meant something to us, in that moment, on that day, and in that context. The story circle was meant as a starting point for the creative work, but in the complexity of our narratives, we identified this same complexity was missing from the YouTube videos. This point of difference became very important moving forward. The content and themes that emerged through these narratives is discussed in Chapter 4.

Embodied Explorations: Deepening the Work and Moving Towards Creation

As we say in the theatre, we “got up on our feet” after sharing and discussing our personal stories and we revisited our moving sculptures from the day before. As we began to formulate a creative response to the videos through our own narratives, I wanted us to tap into our body memory, engaging with our initial impulsive reactions. We spent time remembering
and performing each moving sculpture, moving between them, exaggerating them, and bringing the videos and our responses back into our bodies. From there I gave the following prompts:

Move around the space. As you are walking think about the videos that we watched yesterday and the responses that we had to them both in conversation and in the embodied responses ... Think back to the movement that you did individually at the end of the day yesterday. Think about the stories that we heard this morning, words and images. Let all of these things float through your head, coming in and going out.

As you start to move I want you to start to think about if all those things were combined and they were an environment that you were moving through what type of environment would that be. What types of barriers would you be encountering? How would you have to move in order to keep going forward, in order to keep walking. Let the images come in and out.

Start to play with how you are moving forward, moving backwards, are you encountering barriers? What are those barriers? How are those barriers surrounding you? How are they impacting your body and your movements? What happens when you encounter a video, a song, a certain word, a certain representation? What does that stamina look like to keep going, to keep moving? Start to encounter others in the room. Are they a barrier or an ally?

Continue on your journeys and continue to move. Slow down and take it half speed.

Take it to full speed and then double speed.

Everyone find your own space in the room again. In that space think through the journey from yesterday morning to this moment. Think about all of the different emotions that have come up the different moments that have impacted you and everyone come stand over here maintaining that thought of journey. If you are picturing that journey as something that needs to be moved through we are going to one at a time move across the room. What is that movement that allows you to get there, how do you have the stamina to get through not only this weekend but life. Because this weekend is a compact version of what we encounter everyday. (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)

**Moving Forward: Queer life as a Journey**

Actor 1 moves across the room, hands out, palms raised, straight line, one foot right in front of the other, steps are full of purpose.

Actor 2 balancing unsure, falling side to side, turns around and stomps backwards, balances, turns around and stomps forward with authority.

Actor 3 moves in circles, forwards/backwards, collapsing, sideways, heavy breathing.
Actor 4 walking with purpose. An ally linked in one arm and the other hand over ear.

Actor 5 starts/stops, looks around, dances, starts/stops, looks around, unsure. One step at a time. (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)

The above guided exploration and resulting embodied journey’s provide insight into how our work together was impacting on each individual researcher. This short piece allowed individuals to explore how obstacles were acting upon their bodies and create strategies in which they could continue to move forward in the face of oppressive online representations and normalizing discourses. Here is a short excerpt from the group discussion on this embodied work.

Laura walking in solidarity.

Laura:
Well I remember at one point I had both hands over my ears and the way forward is just to tune some of that shit out, just don't listen to it and keep moving forward and then Pam had the prompt, “what kind of stamina do you need?” and that reminded me, “oh yeah, you have stamina” and then I felt myself getting taller and then walking with my hands around my ears. And then Ben and I made eye contact and then he kind of offered me an arm which I took so that allowed me to take one hand off my ear, so I still had to tune everything out, but at least I had an ally there. Right? ...

Ben:
I loved our, I love that walk, I loved that part of it because I forget exactly what it was that you [Pam] said that made me think... I want to add someone to this part of the journey, and then I ran into Laura and we made really cool eye contact and it was good and like, come along, and then you took my arm and it was this really cool moment. And what you were saying about having one hand up and the other… it is kind of like the person on your left is offering not just alliance and support, but is maybe saying positive things, where you are tuning out the shit that is still happening on your right because you can’t… the person that you go with on a journey you can’t take away all of it but you can remember some of that positivity on the one [hand] and then on the other you still have to do your own blocking...

Laura:
And then I forgot that later on I took my other hand down and I took Maria’s arm and so then the allies you have, the more people in your life that you have then that helps you not have to tune out as much, so it multiplies.

Liz:
When you were all walking in front of me I suddenly felt like this clear path where I was “HEY” I felt like I was in a parade or something, like it was the banner that pushes the crowd apart and then it makes room for big space.

...

Laura:
And how necessary it is for some people to clear the way and make the space. There are lots of people that you talk to, because we talked about Pride, the only time when they will hold their lover’s hands or their girlfriend’s hands is at Pride because that space has been reclaimed, others have claimed it for them, right? And that is the one time a year in a public space where people feel like they can do that. You know how in the dyke march they always have the dykes on the bikes, you know it’s like that big presence there, they lead the way, the noise on the bike…

Ben:
Exhaust and...

Tegan:
And the people who need to be the ones at the front of the parade.

Laura:
Yeah.

Tegan:
Who are those people who need to be trailblazers and are like I need to be loud and big and strong and...

Ben:
Heavy. (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)

**Maria’s tightrope.**

Maria:
...the part that I enjoyed was finding that environment that we would walk through, finding what obstacles, what kind of space it was, and for me it was like walking on a tightrope, constantly trying to balance.

... and then being afraid and not knowing what is going to come next, so turning around and walking backwards and being like, ok I just won’t look. And I think I do that in my
own life or sometimes if I just can’t move forward while looking at it in the face, then I just turn around. It might be the only way that I can make it through, not by closing my eyes and walking forward, but by actually turning my whole body around and being backwards to go through it.

Laura:
Do you know how big those steps were? You must have walked in three steps, more space in three steps, when you weren't looking you made a lot of progress, so that is interesting.

Maria:
Yeah.

Laura:
Because it wasn't tentative when you walked backwards, you didn’t know, so you just ploughed right through. It was closer to Liz’s movements than other things I saw in that activity (pause). So maybe don't pay too much attention.

Maria:
Just go backwards.

Laura:
Just carry on. (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)

Both of these examples demonstrate how participants gained insight into their own experiences through the embodied work. In the first one Laura discusses the need for allies and support systems in the face of homophobia. She found that in walking in solidarity she was able to not only move forward, but also become an activist or trailblazer for others. When she was alone she could do no more than cover her ears with her hands. Similarly, Maria refused to acknowledge her obstacles face on; instead when she avoided looking at them she was able to make unbelievable progress. Although these insights stem from the embodied work and deal directly with the researchers’ experiences, they speak also to our cultural analysis. Laura’s need to work in solidarity is in direct contrast to the solitude we witnessed in the videos (this is discussed further in Chapter 4), while the ideas of stamina, homophobia, and obstacles stem directly from the online representations. In looking at the participants’ experiences in this
activity, we began to explore how our experiences differ from those in the videos by identifying how we as a research team work with these recurring issues and oppressions on a daily basis. It gave us a starting point for creating a response based on our own experiences, and in turn provided insight into the research process and practical ways forward.

**The Process of Creation**

The research team completed the workshop by spending the remainder of the day working towards creating a short video in response to what we had seen, explored and discovered. I analyze the content of this work in detail in Chapter 4. As a creative process the group worked through collective brainstorming which is a diplomatic process of negotiation. After much consideration, it was decided that our process was in fact our product. That the stories and discoveries we had made during the workshop process were what we wanted to say in response to the videos that we had seen. We wanted to share our discoveries and insights from the research itself.

Lawrence Halprin (1970) offers an insightful framework for thinking about artistic process as product in his RSVP cycles of creative process. Here the creative process is not represented as linear, but rather as cyclical, where the creative product or performance is just another phase in the ongoing process of creativity. Halprin (1970) believes that you can start at any point and then move to any other point and back again, with the understanding that there are four points of operation. The first is identifying **Resources**, asking what can we use in the process such as people, objects, things, ideas. What are our goals and motivations? And what inventory do we have to make it happen? The second is **Score**, asking how will we engage in the process, what are our instructions for moving forward? Scoring is an intuitive process of navigation. The third is **Valuation**, engaging in a reflective process and exploring how our
values relate to our work. Valuing involves getting feedback and making decisions. The last is

**Performance**, engaging an action phase, making it happen. The relationship between these four points is demonstrated in Figure 3.

This cycle is important when thinking about creation work because it speaks to the fluidity of the process, where both the performance and the process are sites of learning that feed one another. As a research team we moved throughout this cycle over the course of the workshop, sometimes in large sweeping circles and at other times we were simultaneously in different modes of creativity. For example as outlined in this chapter, our process used
performance work not always as a completed project, but rather as a deconstructive tool, a distancing tool, and a way of communicating ideas to one another. We also spent a lot of time valuing our work, as we worked to make sense of our performances through reflection; which in turn contributed to our research goals. Yet neither of those outcomes would have been possible without an intuitive process driving us forward from one activity to the next, constantly evaluating productive, relevant, and creative next steps. Finally, the research team inhabited all four phases of the creative cycle simultaneously as we worked to create our final response video, drawing on our available resources, our reflective analytical process work, and our performative stories to come together and crystallize into an emergent creative piece of art.

There had been many poignant and insightful performances over the course of the workshop and it was in bringing these together that we were able to build a response. Each person identified their favourite story that they told, their favourite story that they heard, and the story they most connected with. Many of these connected back to our personal narratives, but there were stories taken from the introduction, the 24-hour exercise, the individual performances, and our discussions. People had connected across the process, allowing each stage of the process to feed the final product. All of the workshop activities built on one another in order for the process to become the product. It was therefore determined that each individual would direct a segment, and taken together the five short pieces would stand in solidarity creating one video that complicated the stereotypes we had seen online. Ben speaks to the importance of process work in our workshop:

I think, I think process is really important … I think process can be product and I think process as process is necessary. I can love stories that are entirely, that don’t really go anywhere. But I think, I would say that this weekend needed to come to something, because then it is just another one of those things that we walk away from thinking: “God that was a really great weekend and that is cool.” But I am not sure if it would
have led to us wanting to tell these stories in different ways, the way that you [Maria] talked about like, why haven’t I shared this. Why haven’t I created something around this. It has led to something else that I want to think about writing. (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)

Ben highlights the importance of process for the sake of processing, but then goes on to say that our final creation work fed his next steps as an artist and as an activist. Despite the final video being a culminating activity for our workshop, it was also a starting point for a future writing project for Ben. Therefore, Ben is demonstrating how the RSVP cycle works to build momentum, and how our workshop was only a small part of the potential creation work that this research project facilitated.

As another example of drawing on our research process, Maria cycled back to various moments of our process as she worked on her segment of the video. She recorded the entire group as they engaged in the embodied movement of “happy sex” first proposed by Liz, then she remixed her queer princess story, using the artifact from her personal narrative (wedding ring) as a puppet in the piece. Using a fairy tale narrative structure she told the story of how two wedding rings met, fell in love, and lived happily ever after. Lastly, she recorded a close up of each person stating their response to her personal narrative of family and marriage: “Family, Taking a stand, Transformation, Holds” (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013). In this final piece Maria mixed moments of the process together, re-contextualizing them to create new meanings in juxtaposition to one another. Collective happy sex, a queer fairy tale, and a poem about family. Engaging our process as the product Maria created an original piece of art that disrupted the dominant discourses of the online videos.
Participatory Aesthetic

As a site of resistance to the online videos the research team wanted to create a response that made use of the video format, however, since theatre artists are not necessarily video artists, we encountered a moment of disconnection as we shifted to a filmmaking process. As theatre artists the group had trouble imagining a video aesthetic for their stories. This proved to be interesting as we began to render our product and resulted in something that I am calling a participatory aesthetic. The notion of a participatory aesthetic stems from ideas of process led community arts work (Nicholson, 2005; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Snell, 2013; Taylor, 2003). Here participants, who may or may not have previous arts training, hold the ownership over the creative work (Prendergast & Saxton, 2010; Preston, 2009). Participants work with trained artists and facilitators to render their chosen stories into an artistic outcome. Often this stems from a creative exploratory process not un-similar to the one described above. This community-led work often stems from a social justice agenda and works around certain themes or ideas as community members and participants use their stories as a site of advocacy (Prendergast & Saxton, 2010; Prentki & Preston, 2009). Having worked in the field of applied theatre and community art for many years, I have come to recognize the powerful potential of a participatory aesthetic. It has been argued that there is a negotiation between artistic quality and participation in arts practice (Leavy, 2009; Thompson, 2009), but I disagree proposing instead that a participatory aesthetic is one that draws on the power of personal narratives and creates a raw gritty aesthetic in which powerful pedagogy exists.

For example in our final video, Ben wanted to re-tell his personal narrative; a story of a shared bracelet that queers ideas of ownership and community. Ben wanted the audience of his story to be present on camera during the re-telling, to capture reactions, and demonstrate
collectivity. Aesthetically the research team had noticed that most of the online videos shared a common element - they never had more than one performer on camera at a time. The team felt that this solitude, even within collective pieces, was problematic. They felt that through solo representations, the discourse was producing a sense of individual struggle and negating the importance of community and support. Hence, Ben’s desire to include his audience/community on camera. The result was a genuine and vulnerable performance of sharing one’s own story, where Ben was witnessed and validated by his audience within the framing of the video. It is through this connection between performer and audience that participatory aesthetics emerge and are most effective. I propose here that a participatory aesthetic is one that is rich in vulnerability, engaging participants in the artistic rendering of their own stories, creating a space for genuine connection with audiences and in turn building important pedagogy. It is through the complexity of a participatory aesthetic that audiences can build new knowledge. Therefore, it is my belief that we need to work to better understand participatory aesthetics as we build pedagogically sound artistic work that operates as a site of resistance to the status quo - in both form and content.

**Thoughts on Embodied Knowing, Arts-based Research, and Creative Process**

The weekend workshop moved back and forth between embodied work, discussion, reflection and analysis, each time layering and deepening our understanding of the videos and our relationship(s) to what we were seeing. By working through multiple ways of knowing our analysis was rich and full. What I suggest in this chapter is that research-informed theatre is both an embodied way of knowing as well as a site of analysis. I believe that the creative outcomes do pedagogical work as they create alternative discourses and provide opportunities to engage and re-explore the status quo. The research-informed theatre literature (Ackroyd &
O’Toole, 2010; Goldstein, 2012b; Gray, 2009; Sykes and Goldstein, 2004) focuses on the performance of research findings; here I propose that the performance unfolds as the research and that it moves through the creative cycle, as demonstrated in the RSVP cycle, offering varying phases of insight and analysis. The arts allow us to question our assumptions, build understanding towards the future, and engage in challenging dialogues. They provide an avenue through which marginalized populations can share their stories, and offer opportunities to build relationships. They are a site of cultural resistance, in which participatory methods engage individuals in a collective and creative experience.

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that the embodied work (1) built community, (2) provided personal insights, (3) deepened analysis, (4) made the outcomes and research findings accessible, (5) worked as a counter-hegemonic device, and (6) was a site of resistance and reclaiming. These understandings begin to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 by offering insights into how theatre and media processes can be used as both analytical and transformative tools (Questions 1 & 4). Chapter 4 will continue to explore all four research questions by deconstructing online representations and analyzing the response work of the research team.

**Vignette #3.**

Actor 1 reaches up with one arm.

“Diversity.”

Reaches across and down, covering arm.

“Perversity.”

Repeat.

Actor 2. Impatient.

“I have to get to the club.”

Repeat.

Actor 3 circling the others.
“Oh yeah this fag can rap.”
Repeat.

Actor 4 moves hand in a wavy fluid motion up and down.

Actor 5 dances to the side.
Chapter Four: Solitude and Solidarity

Introduction

In this chapter there are two distinct sections of analysis. In the first half of the chapter, I undertake a thematic analysis of dominant queer representations and discourses as identified by the research team. I describe the themes that emerged through the research team’s deconstructive process and conclude that queer representations on YouTube are currently a site of marginalizing and heteronormative discourses that present a poetics of solitude. In the second half of the chapter the analysis shifts to understanding the creative work that was spurred by using the YouTube videos as creative source material. Through our creative work I explore how the team worked to (re)engage and (re)claim participatory media as a site of disruption and resistance to dominant queer discourses (as identified through the deconstruction and analysis of the videos). This work presents a poetics of solidarity as an alternative framework through which artists, activists, and educators can build transformative dialogues. The focus of this chapter is on the content of the videos and creative work. For a discussion and analysis of the creative process, and embodied work please see Chapter 3.

Identification

In line with the participatory nature of this research project, the identification of dominant queer discourses was determined by participants. Robson (2013) argues that in becoming aware of hegemonic discourses we are more likely to challenge them. This echoes Freire’s (1996) idea of conscientization and Lather’s (1986) idea of catalytic validity, both of which claim that we must know our realities in order to transform them. Therefore, before we could deconstruct how queer discourses inform our ideas of sexuality and gender, we needed to be able to identify those discourses. Through email correspondence before the workshop,
participants were each asked to “Find a short YouTube video that you think speaks to a dominant queer discourse/representation/aesthetic or speaks to a popular understanding of queerness” (P. Snell, email communication, June 10, 2013).

Table 1. YouTube Videos and Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video Title</th>
<th>Video Description</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denice Frohman - “Dear Straight People” (WOWPS 2013)</td>
<td>A spoken word poem addressing straight privilege and queer oppression.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5frn8TAlew0">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5frn8TAlew0</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvira Kurt clip from We’re Funny That Way</td>
<td>A stand up comedian talks about coming out to her mother and the homophobia she faced.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObOTmngQfjg">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObOTmngQfjg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Men Will Marry Your Girlfriends</td>
<td>Playing with gender stereotypes, gay men claim they will make better husbands to women than straight men.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-YCdcnf_P8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-YCdcnf_P8</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’M PROUD! - Episode 1 - Lizzy the Lezzy, lesbian comedy animation</td>
<td>An animated stand-up comedian discusses being an out and proud lesbian.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhzAxAPeoOg">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhzAxAPeoOg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mykki Blanco - Wavvy - Directed by Francesco Carrozzini</td>
<td>A music video that juxtaposes a queer positive and diverse club scene with the oppressive nature of public streets.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sokeAMDm7mk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sokeAMDm7mk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neil Patrick Harris &amp; David Burtka on The Chew</td>
<td>Two famous men on a broadcast talk show discuss their marriage and play a game where they guess what the other will answer.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qI2TuuxUmbM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qI2TuuxUmbM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shit Girls Say to Gay Guys</td>
<td>Dressed in drag, a performer recreates oppressive and ridiculous things said by straight girls to gay men.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m31TOu27kzk">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m31TOu27kzk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one participant followed up with questions of clarification, but upon discussing the process of choosing videos it was clear that all participants had found it challenging because the task had been vague. I had purposely left the request open in an attempt to have participants start to work through their own identification of queerness in popular culture before we came together as a group. Each participant brought in one or two web links, and given the breadth of what is
available on YouTube, the result was a surprisingly homogeneous group of videos. For a list of videos viewed in this research project please see Table 1. Here is an excerpt of the research team discussing their choice of videos:

Liz:
I censored myself… I was like GAY… and then I realized that the things that I identify as… what is the most flamboyant?… I actually didn’t bring in the first video that I wanted to bring in… I was just like, uh. I can’t deal with this…. I didn’t actually offer the first thing that came to my mind… Because it is SO stereotypical, but it is not actually, it is just playing with troupes that I don’t, I don’t care for…

Tegan:
I sent you [Pam] an email about my like, what? Cause at first I was like, no problem… I’ve seen millions of YouTube videos, like, whatever, no problem. And then I was like wait, I don’t know what you mean. Do you mean queer like I see it? Or queer like the queer community sees it as the norm? Do you mean how society views the queer community? Do you mean how the queer community wants to portray to the rest of society what queer is? I was like what are all these myriads of definitions and what are the different relationships that they all have because they are all relationships. And I was like, at what point do I stop and say that is the defining thing. And that was kinda like the email that I sent to you. And you were like all of these or none of them or one of them. That was what I needed, I am not crazy and not overthinking it… so then I just found something that I saw recently that had a few of those questions, I think, posed in it. I realized that I tend to over think and I totally caught myself in that moment…Would you like me to write you a paper on this? Let me explore it for you.

Ben:
So I immediately thought of two that are pretty quick stereotypes... I had this really long conversation with myself and then I just sent the first two videos that I thought of...

Maria:
I went through a process of indecision and wanting to find something really good. But also being like, I don’t really watch a lot of YouTube videos unless someone posts them on Facebook… maybe I should just look up what comes up if I put in gay or LGBTQ rights or something. And then I was like, that is interesting to see what types of things came up and I just sort of selected two from there … Surprisingly “It Gets Better” stuff did not [come up], it wasn’t the first stuff and I thought it might be… I barely saw anything that was not gay men… there was nothing trans, barely anything with people identifying as lesbian or bi or ANYTHING else. It was super focused on just gay men even when I put in LGBTQ… nothing came up from other places… it was very predominantly western, States even…
Laura:
… I don’t spend a lot of time on YouTube so I thought, OK, what is the popular culture that I feel most connected to? … I’ve seen a lot of stand up… Provincetown has stand up every night, and it is really quite interesting… So I googled Elvira Kurt… So, dominant in that it is a coming out story and a coming out story of her mom’s reaction, but I laughed and she does a commentary on the role of stand up to the story that I thought was interesting for us to play with. So I went looking for something specific… (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

The identification of the videos was the first step in our process, but until we deepened the analysis through deconstruction, for the most part, the research team was not able to articulate why they had chosen these specific videos. They were simply videos that caused a reaction, they made us laugh, they made us squirm, they provoked something in us, and often that “something” was contradictory. The next step in our process worked to clarify our reactions and to further understand how the videos’ embedded representations were produced by, and also (re)produced, marginalizing and normative discourses. The group viewed each video in no particular order, then without speaking moved to an embodied analysis (through ‘Moving Sculptures’ as discussed in Chapter 3). From there we came together to collectively analyze, through discussion, our responses to the videos.

Deconstruction

The deconstruction of the videos became a cyclical process, deepening our understanding with each new video that we watched, responded to, and discussed. We worked to understand how the videos spoke to one another, reinforcing and challenging each other through an intertextual dialogue. We asked ourselves what discourses emerged in the liminal space between the video representations, recognizing that the cultural and historical context in which the videos were created and read worked to fix their meaning (Hall, 1997). To challenge this, the embodied process worked to defamiliarize the content by examining it through different lenses
(body, sound, movement, discussion, juxtaposition, etc. as discussed in Chapter 3) and to unfix both the meaning and the knowledge/power (re)produced by the videos (Kaomea, 2003). As a research team we worked to queer the online content - revealing hidden assumptions and dismantling arguments while acknowledging the constructedness of the video texts (Wilchins, 2004).

This work critiqued and complicated hegemonic discourses, and what emerged from our analysis was an overwhelming cacophony of the following themes: normalization, homophobia, representations of privilege, stereotypes, stories of difficulty, and contradictions. For clarification on ideas included in these overarching themes please see Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of YouTube Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>Gender norms, stereotypes, queer as normal, homos fitting heteromold, safe, domestification, no overt sexuality, boundaries of gay normal, imagined queer culture, acceptance, norms, normal, anti-normal, unnatural, outside the norm, fear of homoerotic/“perverse”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>Silence(d), anger, defining queer space, us vs. them, common stereotypes, oppression, underlying conflict, discomfort, internalized homophobic, unspoken, family (of origin), uncomfortable, dismissed, safe spaces, change, conflicting emotion, stamina, shut down, growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations of Privilege</td>
<td>Gender binary, white, gay focus, missing voices, Americanized, addressing straight men, allies, privilege, misrepresentations, demeaning, trivial, gender roles, viewed, visible, partnership/family vs. stereotypes, superficial, disrespectful, ambiguity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Gender, normal, fantasy, acceptance, us vs. them, internalized homophobia, superficial, misrepresentations, demeaning, straight appropriation, overstimulating, grotesque, boundaries of normal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories of Difficulty</td>
<td>Stories of tragedy, disparate connections, power of words, momentary escapism, expression, most epic stories, queer as hard, family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions</td>
<td>Balance, opposition of energy/power, reproduction of homophobia when trying to disrupt/counter, reality vs. imagined reality, conflicting response, conflicting emotion, questioning, jarred, pain to action, apology, challenge, connection, masking, permission.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These themes were identified through collective analysis, transcript coding, and embodied
analysis. Many sub-categories and codes easily fit into more than one of these themes and therefore separating them into individual points of discussion became an impossible feat. The themes listed above intersect and overlap with one another repeatedly. This is demonstrated in Figure 4, where the stories (or in this case YouTube video stories) are the containers through which we encounter marginalizing discourses as represented through our themes. The relationship between these emerging themes, and the discourses they represent, is also dynamic.

Figure 4. A visual representation of thematic categories and their intersecting relationship.

Figure 5. The dynamic relationship between emerging analytical themes.
in that they operate on and feed one another. This is demonstrated in Figure 5 where the following interactions are visible:

- Stories are the container through which we communicate.
- Normalization can be a form of homophobia.
- Homophobia reinforces heteronormativity and privileged representations.
- Stereotypical and privileged representations fuel homophobia which reinforces stereotypes.
- Stories can be used as a normalizing agent.
- Contradictions of self, Other, identities, and emotions are simplified in stereotypical representations of queerness.

The intersectionality and relationality of these themes works to demonstrate the complexity of homophobic and heteronormative oppressive systems as they manifest in popular culture through discursive practices. In the analysis that follows I will work to further deconstruct dominant queer discourses as the research team came to understand them during our workshop and collective analysis. I will use the above themes as a framework for presenting these findings, recognizing that the themes are not neat categories that can be understood on their own, but rather they work together to create a complex picture of online representations and discourses. Using examples from the online videos, our embodied analysis, and our discussions I will offer a queer reading of each of the themes listed above.

**Normalization and Othering**

Normalization and Othering were present in all of the online videos chosen by the research team. In the video representations, fixed identity categories work to represent grand narratives of queerness by collapsing difference and instead producing a discourse that claims
“we are just like you.” These normative discourses work to create limits of queerness by reinforcing notions of sameness (Wilchins, 2004). Using queer theory as a deconstructive strategy the analysis here “aims to denaturalize heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 81).

In one YouTube video (Neil Patrick Harris & David Burtka on The Chew), we saw two rich famous white men interviewed on a broadcast talk show. An audience of white women clapped for them as they hugged each other and discussed their marriage, their kids and other heteronormative ideals (godinvandevrede, 2012). I present here two contrasting queer readings of this scenario. The first reading characterizes the scenario as homonormative, white, domesticated, having no overt sexuality, and defines queer as normal through mainstream assimilation. The second reading presents the scenario as a site of groundbreaking resistance to the heterosexual status quo, providing gay role models, and queering ideas of normal by challenging the traditional model of marriage as a heterosexual act. What is interesting is that our research team’s reading of this video lies in the contradiction between these two very different understandings.

The mainstream acceptance of these two men creates boundaries of the “gay normal” that ostracize and Others anyone who does not identify with these privileged identity categories (white, male, rich, safe) (Tsai, 2010). Yet, at the same time it addresses a mainstream audience and asks them to not simply tolerate this family, but rather, to accept it and affirm it. In this act of making their private lives public, the famous actors are engaging in an act of resistance to the status quo and challenging ideas of heteronormativity, while at the same time reproducing homophobia by policing queer normal through their privileged identity categories and representations (Robson, 2013). Herein lies the dilemma that repeatedly emerged throughout the
research workshop: How do you challenge homophobia without reinforcing it? How do you engage in resistance without oppressing or Othering yourself, or someone else? It is this same contradiction that lies between queer theory and anti-homophobia education, how do you maintain subjectivity, wherein identity categories are fluid and unfixed, while actively working to dismantle oppressive systems (as discussed in Chapter 1 & 5)?

By being (re)presented in the public sphere these celebrities become the story of queerness. Unintentionally they are Othering individuals and communities that are not as easily recognizable to the mainstream audience (Duggan, 2003). Is it their responsibility to kiss rather than hug simply due to their celebrity status? Baym and boyd, (2012) suggest that in making the private public there is potential to impact unknown publics. It is in this unknown public that private stories can unsettle and queer “what we have known and held as truth” (Robson, 2013, p. 138). By providing a positive sexual representation, through an on-screen kiss, these celebrities would be challenging oppressive hegemonies.

Normalization and Othering occurs when we allow our public selves to be defined and fixed by hegemonic discourses. Here the discourses of our culture act upon our bodies as they construct a self that is not unique, rational or autonomous, but rather a self that is defined by the power and knowledge systems in which we are embedded (Sullivan, 2003). Informing our public selves with our private stories complicates these discourses and minimizes stereotypical representations (Pullen, 2010). This example of white male celebrities is provocative because it is fixing queer and queering normal all at the same time.

The following vignette is the research team’s embodied response to the video discussed in the above analysis.
Vignette #4.

Actor 1 stands centre stage. Takes a sexy bold stance that melts into a non-sexy hug.
“Peanut butter... cuddles.”
Repeat.

Actor 2 stands off to the side applauding with a giant grin.
Repeat.

Actor 3 motions towards actor 1 with a thumb point and a nod.
“We are both white.”
Repeat.

Actor 4 in jubilation.
“Yay! You should get married.”
Repeat.

Actor 5 wanders through the others dangling a noodle in the faces of the actors and laughing.
Repeat.

The Silence of Lesbians With a Microphone

A recurring theme throughout the videos was the use of humour as a defence mechanism against homophobia and heterosexism. Three of the videos we watched were solo performances by lesbians with microphones. These performances allowed us as audience members to inhabit the space between laughing and crying by forcing us to bear witness to contradictions of self, Other and intersecting identities. Can we feel proud and ashamed in the same moment? How do conflicting emotions and internalized homophobia manifest? In each of these videos the solo performer decided to speak up, to offer a story, a point of view, a glimpse into their realities. Yet each of these videos was infused with a blanket of homophobic silence. Hall (1997) believes that silence is an important signifier as we work to make meaning of cultural texts. In the following examples I highlight the silences embedded in these online videos.
Silence #1: Addressing straight people.

In response to a video entitled “Dear Straight People” (Button Poetry, 2013), where a spoken word artist addresses homophobia, straight privilege and dominant assumptions about gender and sexuality, Tegan had the following to say:

The video infuriated me in a way, [it was] really eloquently put there, but “Dear Straight People” is really frustrating, everything out there is not to queer people, it is often to straight people. So where are those really beautiful eloquent things that are for us? Like, the defining of the queer space that she talks about. What does our own house look like? Because all we have is someone else's and we are constantly addressing that… (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

In this transcript excerpt, Tegan discusses how the performer was solely addressing an audience that was part of the dominant culture, which in this case is the culturally constructed and dominant institution of heterosexuality (Sullivan, 2003). She calls attention to the fact that the poem “Dear Straight People,” despite addressing issues of oppression and privilege, negates to create a space in which queerness can exist not in contrast to the norm, but rather through its own subjective (non-)definitions. By addressing the dominant culture through a framework of hegemonic discursive practices this video is cloaked in a heteronormative silence (Sullivan, 2003). As the video works to challenge oppressive behaviour it also polices and produces social truths of queer identities, which in this video are bound by ideas of fear, anger, and Otherness (Wilchins, 2004). Here the system of power that constructs normative discourses, as represented in the video, made Tegan uncomfortable and led to the following questions: Would this poem be cloaked in the same oppressive silence if it were addressed to queer people? What does an alternative discourse of, by, and for queer people sound like, look like, and feel like? Could the poem become a site of subversion if addressed to a queer audience? Ultimately, the question is one that has plagued queer theorists and post-structuralists for years: How do we imagine
alternative ways of thinking and living that are not bound by the dominant (Robson, 2013; Sullivan, 2003; Wilchins, 2004)?

**Silence #2: The hard swallow.**

In the next example we have an embodied vignette created by the research team in response to an Elvira Kurt video (bruceintoronto, 2009). In the video the comedian discusses coming out to her mother and the response she received. Here is how the video was analyzed by the research team:

**Vignette #5.**

Actor 1 stands tall and erect centre stage.  
“Maybe it is just a phase.”  
Pause. Hard Swallow.  
Side Step.  
Repeat.

Actor 2 following Actor 1 in voice and body.  
“It is not just a phase.”  
Repeat.

Actor 3 points at Actor 1.  
Laughs.  
Crumple over with laughter.  
Repeat.

Actor 4 kneels below Actor 3.  
Sobbing uncontrollably mirroring crumple of Actor 3.  
Repeat.

Actor 5 off to the side.  
“You think everything is so funny”  
Repeat.

The most indicative of the silences in this vignette is the hard swallow of Actor 1. In that moment of hesitation there are a number of things happening that implicate the performer as uncomfortable. When combined with the statement “Maybe it is just a phase,” a quote taken
from the video, we can understand that the hard swallow is an attempt to literally and
distastefully digest the notion of queerness. The rest of the vignette builds on this silence, as
Actor 2 attempts to disrupt the notion of “a phase” while seeking acceptance that might never
come. Actor 3 and 4 mirror each other finding the complicated emotions between laughing and
crying, embodying both the hurt and ridiculousness of the hard swallow. In this example the
silence of the hard swallow is a deconstructive and embodied example of the way in which the
video represents a story of difficulty. As demonstrated through the embodied response, the video
does not engage with ideas of pleasure, but rather works through normative discourses of
queerness such as rejection, coming out, and pain. In this example we can see how these
discourses act on our bodies creating moments of oppression and homophobia.

**Silence #3: Internalized homophobia.**

In the final example of silence we have a scene from one of the videos:

An animated character steps up to a microphone and boldly states “I’m a muff muncher!
I’m a big butch pussy crunching muff munching muncher. And I am PROUD!” followed
immediately by “Hmmm, I hope my mum and dad aren’t watching this.” (Lizzy the
Lezzy, 2010)

Playing with humour, “Lizzy the Lezzy” vocalizes her internalized homophobia. She is both
proud and fearful in the same moment. Her final statement regarding her parents silences her
bold proclamation of being proud. Lizzy, an animated stand up comedian, is attempting to make
people laugh through this juxtaposition, but she is doing so by playing on discourses of queer as
pervasive, and sex as marginal. This creates a discourse of shame.

All three of these videos have very powerful moments of concealed silence which works
to undermine the potential political activism of the pieces. Instead of creating a queer space in
the overwhelming heterosexual world of popular culture and YouTube, these videos police
identity through their homophobic undertones (Sullivan, 2003). In the case of these three videos, the normative discourses through which the videos are (re)produced and read are more powerful than the representations themselves. This is what creates the silence that becomes evident in the deconstruction of these videos and reveals the underlying tensions of oppression in an attempted moment of resistance.

**Stereotypes and the Trivialization of a “Fabulous” Gay Man**

All of the videos dealt in stereotypes; the short length of the YouTube format lends itself to simplified understandings and stereotypical representations. Two of the videos took these stereotypes to a place that made the research team very uncomfortable. The language is gendered and offensive. The characters are one dimensional and shallow. Yet the view count on these two videos combined is 14.5 million and growing (CollegeHumour, 2012; soundlyawake, 2012). They are meant to be funny, even political, but underneath the surface something more sinister is happening. The characters in these videos are all cis-gendered gay men with a “fabulous” flare. Here is the opening quote from the first video, “Gay men will marry your girlfriends”:

> Americans are becoming more comfortable with the idea of gay marriage. Seeing it as both a moral and civil rights issue. But there are many out there that are still fighting against the cause. And as gay men ourselves we would just like to say to those people, fine keep marriage between a man and a woman and in response. We will marry your girlfriends. … What you don’t think we could. We would be the best husbands ever. Have you seen us, we are ripped. All of us are ripped. It doesn’t seem statistically possible and yet it is true. Because we love going to the gym and you know who else loves going to the gym? Your girlfriend…. Not to mention we dress better than you … What do you make your girlfriend for breakfast, burnt scrambled eggs? We will make her a quiche…” (CollegeHumour, 2012)

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7 Cis-gendered people have a self defined gender identity that matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
This video goes on to talk about how gay men enjoy dance, art, broadway shows, and themed costume parties. That gay men are more emotionally available to women than straight men and that they are “fabulous Luke Skywalkers.” As a plea for same sex marriage this video seems counter-intuitive. The research team made note that this video not only trivializes gay men to a very specific stereotype, it also trivializes marriage. Ben responded by saying:

College humour has this idea to be funny about stereotypes, but it is just kind of too far, because marriage is a partnership and long relationship and you are building a family. It really trivializes what I find to be important to me about wanting to be married at some point. Which really has nothing to do with what we do on our anniversary, yeah those are fun things but, (shiver), yeah. (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

What was most shocking about this video is that it intends to do political work - making a plea for same sex marriage. But it does this by solely addressing straight men and by negating to include women, trans and gender non-conforming people in the debate. We can’t expect the entire queer spectrum to be represented in each and every two minute video, but, this video maintains and reinforces a specific stereotype of gay men and minimizes any attempt at breaking down a simplistic understanding of queerness. Queer theorist, Duggan (2003) argues that it is representations such as this one that demonstrate who is most deserving of rights. In this case that is cis-gendered, upper-class, “fabulous” men.

In the next example, we have an embodied response from the research team. Here the team picked up on many of the problematic phrases from the video entitled “Shit girls say to gay guys” (soundlyawake, 2012):

**Vignette #6.**

Actor 1.
“That’s so gay. No offence.”
Repeat.

Actor 2 puts hand in head. Disbelief.
Actor 3 is confused. Weighing two options with hands.
“One of the girls? One of the guys?”
Repeat.

Actor 4. Flippant
“I love my gay best friend.”
Grabs chest.
“Be with me.”
Repeat

Actor 5 wanders through the others. Loud. Obnoxious.
Repeat.

As the only member of the research team that identified as a gay man, Ben was particularly struck by the video and said:

So much of it is meant as sweet and friendly, but it’s terrible, the whole thing makes me want to put my face in my hands. It is very difficult to leave me without words and that does it. Did you really just say that? What makes you think that is something you want to say to someone? (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

Continuing to play with the relationship between gay men and straight women, this video presents gay men as non-sexual beings. Instead its focus is on the ridiculous and oppressive things that “girls say to gay guys.” The video makes statements such as “That’s so gay. No offence,” “I mean stupid gay, not gay gay,” “I love that you are practically a girl,” and “You are so gay.” They are presented as humour, and with a hint of subversiveness by drawing attention to the ridiculousness of these phrases, but the hidden meaning works to again reinforce a gay stereotype of “apple martinis” and “face masks” (soundlyawake, 2012). In this case the gay man is off camera and voiceless, leaving little space to complicate or challenge the stereotype.

Both of the the above examples use gender as a mechanism for humour. Butler (1990) argues that through parody and the embodiment of stereotypes we can work to denaturalize
heteronormative and gendered notions of identity. That by performing gender in exaggerated ways, for example using camp or drag, we can upset conservative beliefs, practices and forms of representation (Sullivan, 2003). This is a powerful argument with potential for queering popular culture, but despite the embodiment of stereotypes in these two texts they both fall short of working to expose and problematize dominant notions of gender and sexuality. Instead we are presented with stereotypes that homogenize and universalize gayness, fixing identities, and policing gender expression.

**Perversity: The Glorification of Difference**

The last video, “Mykki Blanco - Wavvy,” stood out from the others in the way that it engaged with representations of queerness. The music video takes us inside a club of imagined queer culture. A homoerotic fantasy world with a diverse cast of characters. Drawing on contradictory internal and external states, the video depicts an unrealistic safe space where everyone is accepted and drugs and alcohol provide a decadent escapism. This video stands in contrast with the others in that it doesn’t attempt to work within a heteronormative framework and doesn’t address the dominant heterosexual culture, yet, it still engages with normalization and homophobia through its search for sexual freedom and its ability to revel in the underbelly of queer culture. Here we see an unsafe glorification of difference and diversity (Tsai, 2010).

Liz had a very strong reaction to the fantasy world in the video, trying to understand why we need drugs and escapism to be “in the same mental space for this situation” (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013). Can we not imagine a diverse and sexually engaged queer representation without the presence of drugs and fantasy? Tegan responded by saying:

There is, especially in clubs, there is an opulence that you are going to be indulging in drinks or whatever. There is that indulgence that hedonistic thing that happens, where opulence is the self expression when in reality I look back on these clubs and it is
actually totally gross. There is nothing classy or really decadent about it. You are in a big dark cave room that is humid and smelly and poorly ventilated and sticky, etcetera. You are high as fuck so you don’t care, nor does anyone else. It is gross, but in the moment it is so like, this is perfect. (Video Transcript, June 15, 2013)

This video establishes a link between queer culture and club culture, and our inside and outside selves. It implies that in the club we can be our fantasy selves, while outside of the club we must adhere to gender and other societal norms. In contrast to the other videos that identified queer people as non-sexual, this video sits at the opposite end of the spectrum, depicting sexual freedom and fluidity within a fantasy state. Through it’s overwhelming and fantastical imagery, this video embodies a failure to meet the challenge identified by Ing (2009): “to maintain non-assimilationist, uniquely queer representations without portraying fetishized or frightening and overwhelming images of queer lives that deviate completely from the mainstream is a difficult and ongoing one” (http://comcul.ucalgary.ca/Queervisions). This video works to normalize substance use and clubbing as a safe space for queer expression and in doing so reinforces homophobia through a discourse of queer as perverse, strange, and different.

Searching for the Unspoken

Each of the videos discussed above can be read as an individual text in which meaning is produced through the representations in the videos. But in order to understand how these videos (re)produce wider discourses we must explore the space between them. Hall (1997) suggests that:

… images do not carry meaning or “signify” on their own. They accumulate meanings or play off their meanings against one another, across a variety of text and media. Each image carries its own, specific meaning. But at the broader level of how “difference” and “otherness” is being represented in a particular culture at any one moment, we can see similar representational practices and figures being repeated, with variations from one text or site of representation to another. This accumulation of meanings across different texts, where one image refers to another, or has its meaning altered by being “read” in context of other images, is called inter-textuality. (p.232)
Working with Hall’s notion of intertextuality we can deepen our analysis of the above videos to a discursive analysis of representation, wherein absence and silence signify meaning just as much as what is presented on screen (Hall, 2011). Through collective analysis the research team searched for a deeper meaning by exploring what is not said in the videos (Hall, 1997, p. 263). The result is an extensive list of what the research team did not see in the videos. That list is presented here:

- Colour Diversity
- Polyamory
- Happy sex
- Healthy sexuality
- Positive. Straight.
- Positive queer (not reactionary)
- Queer centric stand-up comedy
- Gender queer & trans
- Bi & questioning
- Much colour
- Queer as umbrella for minorities and social need recognition
- Multiple partners/non standard grouping
- Enough nudity
- Queers that don’t want marriage
- Complexity
- Indecision
- Different ages
- Queer families (added later) (Field Notes, June 15, 2013)

This list is by no means exhaustive of what was not represented (for example differences in class, or ability, or even content that was not American centric), but it is an interesting list for a preliminary analysis of what this research team felt was missing. The above list draws attention to the lack of diverse representations and by doing so works to name how normative discourses and representations marginalize those who do not identify with the grand narratives of queerness as presented in popular culture. Specifically I want to draw your attention to the words complexity and indecision. Based on boyd’s (2009) belief that social stratifications continue to
play out online it is not surprising that there was a lack of diversity in the videos. More surprising is the fact that all of the online representations avoided complexity and indecision, which are fundamental aspects of a subjective and queer life (Sedgwick, 2008). By attempting to fix and simplify meaning, the discourse created by the intertextuality of these videos contributes to heteronormative and stereotypical understandings of queerness. Pullen (2010) suggests that this construction of norms creates and polices the Other. As a site of popular culture, YouTube is feeding the power inequities that build these stereotypes.

Hall (1997) suggests that: “stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’” (p. 258). This creates fixed boundaries of normal, where stereotyping maintains social order by creating binaries such as: “normal vs. deviant,” “acceptable vs. unacceptable,” and “us vs. them” (Hall, 1997). The above list of silences demonstrates that there is work to be done in providing positive queer stories, positive depictions of queer sex, and building a queer discourse that exists on the margins, outside of a heteronormative discourse, language and framework. It is through these new discourses that we can disrupt the status quo (Halberstam, 2011; Hall, 1997; Robson, 2013).

**The Poetics of Solitude**

Based on the above analysis, the research team identified white, middle/upper class, gay/lesbian identified people sharing stories of difficulty as the dominant representations that feed queer discourses of shame, perversion, silence, and normalization, on YouTube. These representations and discourses are mirrored throughout popular culture and can be linked to the societal power dynamics and oppressive systemic structures that infiltrate every aspect of our daily lives (Examples from popular culture include: “Will & Grace,” “The L Word,” “Queer as Folk,” “TransAmerica,” “Blue is the Warmest Colour,” “Boys Don’t Cry,” “But I’m a
Cheerleader”). To deepen this discussion, I want to play out an analysis of what happens when a young, questioning, bisexual person of colour, goes online to search out resources that are not available to them in their homophobic or racist school environment or what happens when a middle-aged, gender independent person goes online to find community and support as they navigate a polyamorous relationship. Unlike previous writers (Alexander & Losh, 2010; Bryson, 2004; Driver, 2006; Gray, 2009) I suggest here that these individuals will have trouble finding validation, community, and positive representations.

YouTube as a site of popular culture informs our ideas about queer identities (Baym and boyd, 2012; Bryson, 2004; Ing, 2009; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011). Using the Triangle Model of Oppression (McCaskell, 2005), we can see that these ideas manifest through individuals and institutions creating an expectation of how gender and sexuality is performed, discussed, policed, and legislated. In Figure 6. YouTube, and popular culture, can be considered an institution that acts upon our ideas and influences individual expression of those ideas. While individual expression, for example the creation of videos, feeds our ideas and institutions. The Triangle Model demonstrates that oppression is inexplicably linked between ideas, individuals and institutions (McCaskell, 2005), all of which are produced through the available discourses of a specific culture (Foucault, 1978). Stereotypes, normalization, privileged identity categories,
and homophobia all manifest within online spaces because the participatory internet (in this case YouTube) is an institution through which individual expressions and ideas can be made public. Therefore, I am suggesting that YouTube operates as a hegemonic device by (re)producing heteronormative and often homophobic and homonormative discourses.

Habermas (1989) believed that the public sphere existed for the sake of political discourse. However, Baym and boyd (2012), suggest that people often engage with the “politicized public sphere for purposes more personal and mundane.” The motivation of online users to read user-generated content is that they will personally benefit from doing so (Preece & Shneiderman, 2009). Therefore, following through on our above examples of queer identified individuals turning to the internet for resources and community, will they benefit from the heteronormative and homonormative discourses that are currently available or will the online texts facilitate a sense of isolation and solitude? The answer will be dependant on each individual, but the above analysis suggests that online discourses will draw boundaries of queerness where individuals feel either included or excluded depending on their own subjective identities.

Robson (2013) suggests that in becoming aware of normative discourses we are more likely to complicate and disrupt them. I build on this by suggesting that we can all become media producers, engaging the production and dissemination of new media texts as a site of resistance. We each possess our own discursive power and the above analysis demonstrates how that power manifests in reductive and oppressive ways (Foucault, 1978; Pullen, 2010). Yet, we can also use that power to create a productive site of (un)knowing through a user-generated popular culture that is a site of validation, a space to be witnessed and understood, and a powerful tool to engage with diversity (Baym & boyd, 2012; Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007;
Pullen, 2010). Through these counter-hegemonic discourses, queerness can be repositioned and
reclaimed, not in contrast to the dominant, but as its own discourse. In the following section I
analyze what arose when the research team attempted to do just that. I shift my analysis to ideas
of counter-hegemony and disruption by analyzing what emerged through the research team’s
response work, presenting emerging and alternative discourses.

Our Queer Narratives: Responding to Popular Culture.

We began the second day of the research workshop with a storytelling circle where each
participant (myself included) was asked to bring an object that represented their unique queer
narrative to share with the research team. The stories were powerful and personal and in direct
contrast to what we had seen in the videos the day before, as discussed and analyzed above.

Here are excerpts from the stories shared by research participants:

Laura:
I brought a book by an American woman playwright named Emily Mann. And the book
is called Testimonies: Four Plays. Emily Mann is someone who writes play scripts from
court transcripts, she writes the plays in an activist kind of gesture to talk about …
injustice from court trials] … [One particular play: Execution of Justice was] very
important [to me] as I merged my research life and my playwriting life together. The
subject of that particular play [Execution of Justice], anti-homophobia, activism, the
injustice, the stamina… That was the type of work that was important as I was
developing into the kind of theatre artist that I wanted to be, merging my skills as a
researcher, and my work as a queer activist, and my work as a playwright … [My second
artifact is the story of my own play] and it tells the story of how I did the research and
how I worked with folks to workshop the script… It is the story of the birth of research
informed theatre … Those are the two artifacts and that is my unique queer narrative
about who I am as a queer activist, who I am as a theatre artist, and who I am as an
academic and how I got there.

Tegan:
So my object … [is] a little black bag… A soft black bag, completely nondescriptive and it
has a draw string … One of the biggest things is that I have never really felt comfortable
with being labelled in any kind of one way. I am very politically active, but I don’t feel
like that is a defining factor. I thought about bringing a Canadian flag, cause I do things,
but that is not representative. Some people need to have labels to put on me and that is
fine. I totally get that and I totally understand people’s need to identify certain people
and I’ve never really felt comfortable in that and I have managed to make peace with that. You can call me whatever you need to call me to understand it, but really what’s in the bag is mine and I might show you parts of it that might be relevant, but at the end of the day you can look at that bag and call it whatever the hell you need to. But what’s in the bag is mine. Does that make sense?

Liz:
Well, this is a little guy, … it’s a turtle on a turtle. I found it in chinatown when I was with my girlfriend walking around when she first got to Toronto … I really like beaded structures… This is complicated, but we were talking about when there is no end to a question and when … there is no answer because there is always something underneath… Physically that relationship of having a turtle on top of a turtle … (Sigh).
We have a very specific relationship in terms of what we do for each other actually. So, not to say that one carries another person, but we take turns I think in how we need to be with each other and depending on what we need at the time or whatever … I don’t need to have all the answers and I think it is a little… Also being with someone who is incredibly challenging in the sense that she is so smart that sometimes we have to stop ourselves like there are no answers we will both keep going, there is no definitive and that is even a representation of like our relationship, by vaguely not standard. I don’t know it’s interesting.

Maria:
My object is my ring. This is my wedding ring. So I used to wear a ring on this finger that was from my mother, that was my be good ring, and I was to wear it until I got married. To a man. And then it would be replaced … so it is interesting that the first thing I wanted to share was definitely my wedding ring. … It represents obviously my amazing partnership, amazing life long love, best friend, person who I get to be with forever and all the meaning of that. But it is also this journey with my family and the process of coming out, of navigating and negotiating the levels and multiple layers of rejection and hurt and acceptance of self and acceptance from my family… because the wedding was coming up and because we were going to be married it forced them to say, ok this is a real thing, and we have to tell people. And I had said, ok I want everyone to come… and I know you have said you can’t tell people but I want people at my wedding day… Both of my grandmothers who are in their 80s and every single member of my extended family was at the wedding and my mom and dad were thrilled and smiling and have not stopped talking about it being the best wedding in the world for the past three years. So it was just this drastic drastic change that obviously was a process for them and a process for me and took a very very long time to get to and is still a process where a lot of that hurt is still underneath things, but is so so so much better, and then also every time I look at my ring I am obviously reminded of my wife and our life together and our journey together and I just feel so lucky and so (pause) it, it holds a lot.

Ben:
My object is this bracelet. I’ve had a thing about bracelets since I came out, as like a symbol of queerness, because it wasn’t something that men wore if you were straight …
so this is not actually my bracelet, I purchased it in Cuba in 2011 when I was on placement … After I got back from Cuba I went on a tour of Supporting Our Youth where I did my second year placement that started in September … I met my supervisor Jean, and I met Julie, who is another staff member there, and she jokingly, like, coveted the bracelet. She said … “oh if you ever think you want to give that up…” and Jean broke in by saying “that would be against our gifting rules” because I am a student and we all had a laugh about that and I joked about giving it to Julie, like in order to pass … I was there for 8 months … Julie really liked the bracelet… We had team meetings … and I would sit next to her, and this [bracelet] is uncomfortable to rest on a desk so I would take it off and put it down and Julie would pick it up and wear it. But she would do it like a little kid, so subtle … When I left SOY … I gave Julie a card and I pulled this [bracelet] out of my pocket in a bag… and she opened it and she couldn’t believe it and she was like oh no, you cant do this. I was like no Julie you love this bracelet and I want you to have it, take it on a new set of journeys. She said, “I will consider this a loan and this is OUR bracelet” and I said, “whatever you tell yourself Julie, this is your bracelet.” I really wanted her to have it … We don’t see each other very often, but when we do, we exchange the bracelet. And I like to think that there is a story there: What happens when Julie has the bracelet? Julie has a family and a partner, two lovely kids. Ben is single and sad … and just turned 30 and wants a family and kids someday. Julie is getting her kids ready for school. Ben is dragging his butt out of bed for work or workshops … So it’s a shared thing … This is a deep connection.

Pam:
… I never came out to my parents or any of my family members. That is not something that I ever did. It is not something that I am ever going to do at this point in my life. There was a lot of joking around the wedding time that I should add something into my wedding speech like, “by the way, in case you didn’t know, this is happening” and it is funny, it wasn’t a purposeful thing to not do it, it was something I was too terrified to do … and I remember in university there was a lot of conversations with friends who were like you just have to tell them, they probably already know. But I couldn’t, I am so close to my parents and that is just way too scary, on the off chance that it is an issue, I can’t do it. So, it just never happened and I would introduce them to people I was dating at the time or whatever … I have always wondered, when did they know, right? … because I probably didn’t have an overt conversation until long after they already knew. So. Well maybe this when they knew. I was living in Switzerland during my summers in university, I went to a parade. It wasn’t a pride parade … like this (shows photo of nude chest painted with a rainbow) and became kind of a media sensation at this parade in Geneva and my photo ended up all over the internet and I was really proud of this celebrity and I was really excited that I was all over the internet. So of course I emailed this photo to my parents and many versions of it because there was like 100 of them online… but I didn’t have an overt conversation with them for many years after this, and I was like, I wonder if that is when they knew … So I still don’t know. I should ask them, is that when you knew?… I think that in some ways that is kinda cool and kinda good and really amazing and it is a non-issue. It just was… (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)
In Table 3, you can see a preliminary analysis of the stories.

**Table 3. Personal narrative analysis.**

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<th>Group Analysis Upon Hearing Story</th>
<th>Coded Thematic Analysis</th>
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What emerged in the group debrief was that our unique queer narratives worked exclusively with the themes of family and identity (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013). Our relationships and understandings of family were complicated and fluid, as were our identities. This was demonstrated in narratives that explored the negotiations we each undertook with our
families. For example, negotiations that attempted to legitimize our relationships, sometimes through marriage; or challenged coming out narratives, sometimes through refusal to disclose or announce our queer identities; or worked to redefine family, through our chosen and non-normative family formations. Each member of the research team had experienced and worked through these themes in unique ways, yet there was a shared unity in our journeys. Ben stated:

Liz used the word common, I think it was for your story (Pointing at Pam) and I really got a lot of commonality in all of our stories, which I mean could be really coincidental, or it could be really universal about queer narratives. I have noticed in other groups that there is generally... in other groups someone shares something and at least one other person goes “totally.” (Video Transcript, June 16, 2013)

We connected with a feeling of being both witnessed and validated in the stories we shared and in the stories that we heard (Jones, 1996). The narratives were a site of connection between participants (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007). The discussion swirled in many directions as new stories were provoked and told, from our celebrations of queerness to our own struggles with perception, heteronormativity, and identity. The stories we shared, and the reflection that followed, honoured the differences between our narratives, not trying to collapse them into a single story, or a universal story. Each narrative was complex, personal and yet relatable in its genuine expression. In response to grand narratives that “lead to totalising and universalizing discourses and practices” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 40), Sullivan (2003) suggests that post-structuralists are concerned with “the differences within and between people, and the ways in which these are constructed and lived” (p. 40). Positing the narratives of the research team in comparison to the normalizing discourses that dominate YouTube, this argument is brought to light. By honouring the differences between us and our narratives the research team was able to find points of genuine connection with one another. The complexity and positivity of our stories stood in direct contrast to the simplicity and negativity in the video representations of queerness,
as discussed above. This point of difference became a driving factor as the group moved into the creative work and we began to explore what we needed to say in response to the online videos.

**Connections**

In the transcript excerpt below, Laura discusses the connections that the research team made while working with personal narratives and describes how the themes from our storytelling circle are important in the creation of disruptive artistic texts.

Laura:
I just remember it being really, uh, important, uh, because the artifacts ended up allowing us to talk amongst ourselves, um, as you know, queer theatre artists and queer theatre activists and you know, people in, in relationships about what it was like, right? To live our lives and uh, there were lots of resonances, you know, across that storytelling and in a sense if you think about it, back to it, I mean those are the stories that we probably want to see more of, those are the stories that we want to talk about… AND I remember a lot of talk about identity with a uh collective desire not to ah um get into a place where we were fixing our identities, a lot of talk about uh wanting to be fluid and the… probably the story that or the object that symbolized that the most was the black bag.

Ben:
Right.

Liz:
mhmmm.

Laura:
Tegan’s black bag. And then we talked about connection to our partners, the two turtles, right? and then we talked about, you know? getting married and to our partners and back to um families of origin. So there was um ah, a lot of family talk and then chosen family. So family of origin, chosen family, partnerships, shifting identities, like, the material, the cultural material of which one can create art out of, that is what I felt happened there. (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)

Laura undertakes an important point of analysis when she states: “I mean those are the stories that we probably want to see more of, those are the stories that we want to talk about” (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013). Here she is identifying our stories as a queering of popular culture, a site of subverting the dominant and reclaiming of public space through specific stories (Sullivan,
Filled with contradictions and complexity, our personal narratives, work to disrupt heteronormativity through their relatability. The ability to connect with these alternative stories subverts the stereotyping and homogenizing of queerness, building instead a discourse from the margins that is complicated and subjective (Robson, 2013). From this understanding the research team decided to use our personal narratives to create a counter-hegemonic video response that could operate as a site of activism, depicting queer voices, queer stories, and queer bodies not bound by the dominant.

**Affective Art**

Drawing on our personal narratives, the group began a collective creation process to arrive at a response video. The research team wanted to create a video that would “address, advocate, respond, name it, and bolster flexibility” (Field Notes, June 16, 2013). There was a strong desire to create a short video that complicated and problematized the dominant discourses of queerness available on YouTube, as identified above. In developing a list of “must haves” for the video the group arrived at the following:

- positivity
- no white men
- positive queer experience

- not normal
- not justification
- not validation
- anti-homonormative

- being ourselves outside of the box

- not a story of difficulty

- who is missing
- who is silent

- sharing stories
The research team wanted to use our own narratives as a site of resistance and activism, challenging and disrupting what they had witnessed in the online videos. Ideas of positivity, diversity, and collectivity dominated the discussion.

As the research team navigated the creative process we hit a point of conflict when it came to how we were going to encompass all of these goals into a single video. The creative work became weighed down by questions of positionality, speaking for Others, universal vs. personal stories and finally by form. We returned to questions that emerged earlier in my analysis: How do you challenge homophobia without reinforcing it? and How do you engage in resistance without oppressing or Othering yourself or someone else? The research team kept circling back to these questions leaving the group in a perpetual state of processing (Kumashiro, 2002; Sullivan, 2003).

Working through these questions, Tegan thought that letting a camera in on our conversations would provide insight and original discourse, while Maria disagreed, saying that this would defeat the purpose of creating engaging and thought provoking artistic work. She
argued that while it may be fascinating to be sitting in the circle as we process the marginality and mundanity of queerness, as an advocacy tool and product “it’s boring to watch from the outside.” Similar to Thompson (2009), Maria is claiming that in order to do pedagogical work, the art form must also be aesthetically sound and emotionally engaging.

In the group debrief session Liz offered an insight by suggesting that we needed to re-conceptualize artistic process as the product (discussed in Chapter 3). Tegan, Maria, and Liz all have valid points. If we accept the notion that process is product, then we are using alternative artistic forms as a way of claiming an incomplete state of knowing, or put another way, we are eternally in a state of becoming. This post-structural and queer notion works to unfix meaning through a subjective and shifting state of knowledge and power (Ellsworth, 2005; Foucault, 1978; Sullivan, 2003). By making our process the product we are queering the artistic structures that contain our stories and subverting the contributions of form in (re)producing normative discourses. For example the majority of videos analyzed by the research team presented a single performer on camera. Could working collectively create an aesthetic challenge to this discourse of solitude?

Maria believed that if we wanted the work to “bolster, advocate, and address” then we must work to build a piece that is both engaging and in a state of becoming; that working to both of these ends would be the only way to create a piece that was not bound by hegemonic structures, but rather engaging in a counter-hegemonic site of disruption. If the artistic work is not affective it cannot and will not be effective in furthering an alternative discourse (Thompson, 2009). Therefore, could the research team work with Tegan’s idea of turning the camera on ourselves, knowing that the only stories we can tell are our own (positionality), while still
creating a product that was both in process (queer), and engaging to an audience (affective)?

This became our challenge.

**How Queer Am I Today? A Short Video of Resistance**

The research team decided to retrace our steps through the entire weekend and identify our favourite stories as a guide to our creative work. What emerged was a video in which each participant shared a short story, where we used moments from the research process to comment on and explore the complexities of presenting and defining queerness, and where we worked to juxtapose phrases, ideas, and images. The final video was a summation of our analysis of online discourses, and a culminating activity for the workshop. During the creation work, the research team was able to deepen the analysis of online queer discourses and move towards disrupting representations that feed heteronormativity. Sullivan (2003) states: “Queer theory… concerns itself with ways in which cultural texts… (in)form our understanding and experiences of sexuality and subjectivity” (p. 190). The analysis below draws on this framework by analyzing the work of the research team and how it contributes to understandings of “sexuality and subjectivity.” Included here are three short excerpts from the final video, created by the research team, that provide insight into how creative work can build alternative discourses and political action.

**Video excerpt #1.**

*The following phrases fade in and out over a black screen:*

my little faggot is going to be roughed up.

it was a non issue. it just was.

our parents behaved badly.

tomorrow is Wednesday. birds go tweet.

i think queer people are better at that.

*The audio begins as the above phrases continue to flash across the black screen.*
Tegan Voice:
Yes we are queer, so does that mean that we have to be like “I’m queer, I’m queer” every eight seconds.

Above phrases continue to flash across screen. Fade in image of five people moving around a space with arms and legs spread as if they were rolling on giant balls. Audio continues.

Tegan Voice:
no. but. we are also responding and trying to...we are in nature deviating from a dominant culture and trying not to continually, pointedly address that dominant culture all of the time and, and I think that is something that we need to be aware of…

Giant ball image fades into an image of six people sitting in a circle in discussion. Image now matches audio.

Tegan:
…that we do need to say at times. We’re queer and we are not addressing dude with the big truck in the muscle shirt. We’re addressing us. So is the idea just allowing a camera in on this.

Fade in to close up of Tegan speaking directly to the camera as she tells her story.

Tegan:
So… my object is a little black bag and uh, it’s small, it’s a soft back nondescript bag with little drawstrings and I was struggling with what object represents me and… I thought about a Canadian flag, I thought about things that politicalize me because I am very politically interested and active, I thought about all of the different things that I collected, I had been a musician at one point. I am also an artist, I’m a theatre artist. Where do all of these things fit? I’ve have been with men, but now I am with a woman. And what labels am I associating with myself? And then I remembered that I am all of these things and also have the freedom to be all of these things and be none of them tomorrow. And I have my little black bag for all of the things that are me inside of them and you can call them whatever you need to be. If you need to understand me in a certain light or if I need to bring something out of it to represent myself in a certain way I can do that and I have the freedom to do that because I am not giving myself those labels it’s what is private and mine and it’s what is inside my little bag, and you can call my little bag whatever you need to. And that is what is being queer to me.

Fade out of Tegan Close Up
Fade in to image of six people sitting in a circle

Laura:
That is a really interesting idea. Cause there was times where we were getting into something and we had some amazing things going on. What happens you know when
five queer artists get together in response to some really interesting questions? or provocative questions?

As Laura speaks a faint overlapping image of embodied analysis work fades in. Both images are visible - six people sitting in a circle and those same people as performers moving around the space.

Fade out both images.

In this first excerpt we have the opening sequence and the first story of the video. The opening sequence is interesting because there are a number of things happening simultaneously. The phrases that flash across the screen are quotes from the workshop. They are presented out of context, yet they do the work of contextualizing the video. They immediately identify the work as queer, and implicate the audience as co-constructors of knowledge by asking audience members to make sense of the phrases. The embodied work also contextualizes the video by claiming that this artistic conversation is one that moves beyond words. The audience does not know that the embodied movement represents “happy sex” to the performer/researchers, but it demonstrates that through this abstract contribution we are inviting audience members to come on an exploratory journey, uncovering unspoken meanings. Finally we have Tegan’s opening remarks, in which she frames the purpose of the video by stating that a) we are queer, b) we want to respond to dominant discourses, c) we want to address other queer people, and d) we are going to do this by telling our own stories.

As the video shifts to Tegan talking about her little black bag the work of disruption begins. In her story, Tegan shares her discomfort with labels and her desire to engage with a shifting subjectivity. She can and will be whoever she feels like being on any given day despite external social pressures to fix her identities. Through her black bag metaphor, Tegan’s story concretizes abstract notions of queer theory, including performativity - the notion that gender is
constructed through repetitive unconscious acts and produced through cultural discourses acting on our bodies (Butler, 1990); identity as discursively produced - the notion that our bodies/subjectivities are policed and bound by culturally and historically specific discourses (Foucault, 1978); and the shifting subject - that we are not rational autonomous beings, but rather constructed through our relation to others and power/knowledge systems (Sullivan, 2003). Tegan is attempting to thwart and problematize the way that dominant discourses, as presented by others and manifesting in the above notions, attempt to fix her identity. Tegan’s story frames ideas of intersecting identities, claiming that we can be more than one thing at any given time, that our identities are overlapping and sometimes conflicting, but they are ours nonetheless (Crenshaw 1991; Kumashiro, 2002). Queerness is simply one ingredient in Tegan’s little black bag of subjective identities.

**Video excerpt #2.**

*The following phrases fade in and out over a black screen:*

what are your survival navigation tactics?
it doesn’t have to be your darkest story.

*Fade in to six people sitting in a circle*

Liz:
Signifiers like, how do we show people we are gay… how do we be cupcakes with rainbows inside without being rainbow icing. Um. Like that kinda notion of.. like. so.. ok. You watch certain, well, most videos.

*Liz continues to speak, the image now flashes between the youtube videos that the research team watched and analyzed.*

Liz:
and, like what are the things that we even, if we are flicking through the myriad of 600 channels and you stop on something and you say well this is a gay thing. What are the things that like identify that as being gay? Is it having a multitude of colours? Is it a very specific modern palette? Is it…Do all of the women have certain kinds of haircuts? are there, are all the people in…
Image returns to six people in a circle. Audio and video now match.

Liz:
I am interested in the thing that makes us stop and say that’s gay. Even if we are on TV. And then how do we not present those and still come across…?

Image fades to black with the following phrases:
what do we choose to tell each other?
how do pots and pans battle with queerdoms fluidity?

The second excerpt comes part way through the video. It starts and ends with un-contextualized phrases, but this time those phrases are attempting to deepen or complicate the audiences’ understanding of the video’s narratives. One of the things the research team struggled with most was the idea of representing queerness without Othering ourselves. The team wanted to create a video of alternative discourses that represented the diversity of the queer community, but also felt that ethically and politically we could only speak from our own experiences. This excerpt from the video draws attention to navigating this complicated discussion and in doing so provides freedom and space to tell our stories as we choose to tell them.

Liz speaks about signifiers and identifiers of queerness. Hall (1997) notes that signifiers are produced and read within specific cultural contexts that often work to fix the meaning of the signifying event. The surrounding dominant cultural discourse is therefore (re)produced as we work to identify ourselves as queer. How do we name our video as queer without falling into the trap of creating stereotypes? The research team chose to address this potential pitfall by including a short piece that pointedly addresses this concern in the middle of the video.

The reflexivity, self-awareness, and humility of this excerpt gives us, as a creative team, space to play with what queerness means and call for unfixed understandings. By including this discussion we both identify the dominant (through the visual images of the YouTube videos) and
then state that we don’t want to engage that discourse. Instead, we want to create our own. This is an important moment of resistance and activism that enables the surrounding video components the freedom to work as a site of disruption.

As the piece on signifiers comes to a close, the words “what do we choose to tell each other?” come up on the screen. Again this deepens the analysis by adding commentary. Everything we say is constructed knowledge and holds discursive power. We are making choices in how this is presented and how we are represented. Through a queer reading, one might ask who is being served by the discourses (re)produced in this video? The deconstructive work within the video (commentary, embodiment, self-referencing) denaturalizes the embedded power structures, making them both evident and obvious to an audience. Collectively, audiences and performers are building new discursive spaces as they work to make sense of the video text.

**Video excerpt #3.**

*The video ends with the following phrases fading in and out over a black screen:*

what stories are here?
what are our stories?
this is a story, not the story.
i hope my mom and dad don’t see this.
how queer are we today?

This last excerpt is from the final seconds of the video. The work these phrases do again implicates the audience as co-constructors of knowledge. It asks the audience to engage with critical thought about what they have just seen, working through a poststructural framework of unfixing the meaning of the stories, not attempting to offer conclusions or truths, but instead suggesting that this is a representation of our stories to be contextualized by audiences (Lazzara, 2010). The intention of the artists may be different from how the viewer deconstructs or makes meaning of these messages and stories, but by leaving that interpretation open and ending with a
series of questions the work is encouraging exploration, hence leading to a powerful form of pedagogy (Ackroyd & O’Toole, 2010; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011).

The Poetics of Solidarity

As you can see in the above analysis, the themes, ideas, and representations that emerged from the creative work are in direct contrast to the online representations we had earlier identified. In the resistance work we found: complexity vs. simplicity, shifting identity vs. fixed stereotypes, positivity vs. negativity, alternative vs. dominant, and solidarity vs. solitude. In designing this research project I wondered if the research team would unintentionally reinforce the dominant themes and representations as we worked to build our own creative text. Robson (2013) notes that as we strive to create something new, we are still bound by established forms and ways of knowing. But even with the recognition of this possibility, and specifically looking for those moments of tension, I think that the humility and vulnerability of the research team allowed disruptive and transformative texts to emerge, texts that challenged rather than reinforced the status quo.

Through both the process and the product, the research team and our stories stood in solidarity with one another, we built a small community of researchers and artists. During the debrief session the idea of community and connection emerged again and again as an important element in building counter-hegemonic discourses (Field Notes, June 26, 2013). Kendall (2011) suggests that “community evokes empathy, affection, support, interdependence, consensus, shared values, and proximity” (p. 309). So, how do we inform online queer discourses with these ideas of community and connection? How do we build empathy, support, and affection through counter-hegemonic texts? As Lather states (as cited in Robson, 2013, p. 88) we must “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently.” It is through the collective
storytelling and dissemination that the most powerful anti-oppression education work occurred in this project. Therefore, if we are going to continue to queer online discourses we must aggregate our diverse stories. Individual videos are rarely viewed, but collectively and intertextually they can influence and transform the way that queerness is represented, understood, and discursively produced in popular culture (Alexander & Losh, 2010).

Finally, in solidarity we must work to combat stereotypes, because as Adichie (2009) says they are not “untrue,” they are simply “incomplete.” Hall (1997) claims that replacing negative stereotypes with positive representations will create a balance, but will not displace the negative representations, it will simply maintain the binary where meaning continues to be framed by the stereotype. Instead he suggests that we should work stereotypes against themselves, making them strange and uninhabitable (Butler, 1990; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2011; Sullivan, 2003). The video created by the research team chose not to engage in stereotypes. However, creative forms such as parody, can continue to build on the work of using cultural texts as a form of disruption to normative discourses. Participatory media sites, such as YouTube, provide an opportunity to engage in alternative discourses, to defamiliarize stereotypes, and to build counter-publics. It is an “intricate dance between hegemony and counter-hegemony in popular culture” (Lazzara, 2010, p. 59), but the analysis in this chapter shows that it is possible to work towards building artistic online conversations that feed rather than marginalize the queer community.

Summary

In this analysis chapter I began by identifying and deconstructing queer representations on YouTube. Through this analysis I worked to understand the marginalizing and normative queer discourses that were producing these representations. I then shifted to an analysis of
creative work as a site of disruption and transformation, where heteronormativity is challenged and problematized through an original video created by the research team. I conclude the chapter by noting that artistic conversations can operate as anti-oppression education which I take up further in the next chapter.
Chapter Five: Queer Resistance

Introduction

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, I establish that public pedagogy occurs within informal sites of learning, and that popular culture is one of these sites. I also proposed that YouTube and the participatory internet is ever present as an important site of user-generated popular culture. Here, in my final chapter, I suggest that YouTube has the potential to be reclaimed as a site of resistance and counter-hegemony through the creation of artistic stories. This final chapter brings together key insights from the research project, connecting them to action oriented pedagogy and summarizes the significance of the project by offering a queer public pedagogy that combats homophobia and heterosexism’s regulating influence over queerness.

Anti-Oppression Education as Queer Resistance

As discussed in Chapter 1, Kevin Kumashiro (2002) provides a framework that includes four approaches to anti-oppression education: 1) Education for the Other, 2) Education about the Other, 3) Education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and 4) Education that changes students and society. By engaging YouTube as a site of queer resistance, artistic video work can concurrently engage with all four approaches to anti-oppression education. I will use the video created by the research team to demonstrate how I envision a reclaiming of popular culture to act as a multi-faceted anti-oppression education project.

Education for the Other.

The advantage of using an online, free, participatory space to educate for the Other is in its highly accessible and inclusive nature. Unlike a traditional classroom, the need to define the Other is no longer present, rather the viewer can be anyone with access to the internet. The restriction being, that the digital divide is still present and access to the internet is not a forgone
conclusion (Torenli, 2006). However, for those who have access to the internet this opens up spaces for individuals with intersecting or undetermined identities. It becomes an alternative space where anyone can engage with the material, whether they choose to identify themselves or not. Individuals can choose to be anonymous, to be passive consumers of the videos, or to use the online platform to engage in dialogue. I argue in Chapter 4, that this simplistic understanding of participatory media negates to understand that systemic barriers present themselves in online spaces. Yet, despite the current manifestation wherein YouTube is a site of oppressive discourses, it is my belief that the potential to break down those barriers and reclaim online spaces still exists. Therefore, I believe that it is possible to use online spaces as a site of anti-oppression education that educates for the Other. The video created by the research team engages with education for the Other by specifically addressing a queer audience through a platform that minimizes barriers of engagement.

**Education about the Other.**

The analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrates that online discourses are currently falling into the potential pitfalls of this category by presenting stereotypical representations and drawing comparisons to the norm. These collapse education about the Other into a single story. But if we use artistic storytelling to complicate these representations, and to offer personal narratives that challenge stereotypes, then online videos can easily work to build empathy and understanding across lines of privilege and oppression. For example if we draw on the video made by the research team, we have a collection of diverse narratives that provide insight into the experiences and histories of these queer identified people. They are funny, complicated, and mundane stories that share a genuine expression of queer life as these five people understand it. They are not the most extreme stories, and they do not attempt to speak for all queer people, but
rather they are a small snapshot into the lives of these Others. If we can aggregate these type of stories then we can challenge the current discourses, building allies as we recognize self in other and Other in self.

**Education that is critical of privileging and Othering.**

Education that is critical of privileging and Othering requires a critique of oppressive structures. In the research team’s video this is done by layering the personal narratives with quotes from the research project. While sharing stories of the Other the video uses artistic form to comment on, analyze and evaluate the stories. The passive engagement of a video audience makes this approach difficult as it attempts to engage critical thinking. But through abstract and non-traditional video work we can create critical spaces of analysis through techniques such as juxtaposition and physicalization. This is done in the research team’s video by layering text, embodied movements, and commentary throughout the narrative accounts.

**Education that changes students and society.**

In the final approach, Kumashiro works to challenge dominant discourses and ways of knowing by engaging in a poststructural framework of unknowing and deconstruction. The goal here is to create new discursive spaces that will complicate the other three approaches. My suggestion is that by engaging YouTube as a subversive site of education we can (re)conceptualize oppression and its associated discourses, creating a space within the margins of popular culture where new discourses can emerge. In the video created by the research team, the techniques that worked to critique the narrative accounts (juxtaposition and physicalization) also worked as deconstruction techniques. By not offering a straight forward narrative, the video asks the audience to become co-constructors of knowledge. This provides a space for audiences to re-imagine social discourses as they act upon the bodies of both performer and audience member.
Queer Resistance: Key Insights

As I write this in the Autumn of 2013 we are in a moment that people are calling the “Glee” generation, that is, a cultural moment where gay and trans TV characters are celebrated and embraced, and where the President of the United States formally reassures queer youth that it does "get better" by creating a video contribution to the campaign of the same name. As Ben says in our debrief session: "It is 2013, homophobia is over." Ben goes on to say this is just not true. Homophobia and heterosexism are still a significant form of oppression, they need to be addressed, understood, and resisted. In a Canadian national survey of queer youth in schools Taylor et al. (2011) found that: 70% of students (queer and non) reported hearing homophobic comments everyday, 64% of queer students feel unsafe at school, and that 21% of queer students reported having been physically harassed due to their sexual orientation. Queer youth in these homophobic situations often seek other avenues for validation and community support, one of which is the internet (Driver, 2006; McCready, 2013). What this research project demonstrates is that these online spaces are not free of homophobia, but rather are reproducing it through hegemonic discourses. I propose that this does not need to be the case and that we can work to reinvent popular culture through participatory and artistic outlets.

How we understand the world is how we see it represented through images and stories (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007; Hall, 1997). Participatory media has made it possible for the average internet user to create “critical interventionist pedagogy” through publishing a blog, a video, and even a Facebook post (Ried, 2010). There continue to be power imbalances in counter publics and we must therefore scrutinize these sites in order to make marginalized communities visible and re-write heteronormative and marginalizing discourses (Kidd & Rodriguez, 2010; Robson, 2013). Users have a role in shaping cultural discourse (Ried, 2010),
by telling stories that make sense of the world through an emergent self that constructs and
reconstructs identity (Coulter, Michael & Poynor, 2007; Robson, 2013). This research project
shares the following key insights:

1. YouTube, which has an influence on cultural knowledge production, is a skewed
   representation of queer identities. Current representations depict privileged identity
categories and dramatic stereotypes operating as a marginalizing site of normalization and
homophobia.

2. In order to continue to combat homogenizing normative discourses we need to engage from
   the margins; not defining queer identities in contrast to the norm, but through an original and
   alternative discursive space.

3. Popular culture has the potential to be reclaimed as a site of resistance and counter-
   hegemony; opening up counter publics with the potential to defamiliarize and disrupt
   heteronormativity and other marginalizing discourses.

4. Stories of, by and for marginalized communities are largely missing from popular culture
   and are an important part of validation, community building, and connection.

5. The arts build a multifaceted way of knowing, connecting, and sharing stories; providing
   opportunities to engage with complicated, interesting, and provoking narratives that disrupt
   the status quo.

Robson (2013) believes that “we have inherent readiness to hear and understand
stories,” and that “the telling of stories serves as a vital social function in communal acts of
constructing societies and cultures” (p.2). Therefore by aggregating diverse queer stories
through participatory media we can engage public pedagogy as a site of resistance that fulfills
all four of Kumashiro's approaches to anti-oppression education. In the words of bell hooks
(2009) “We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (p. 85). This research project demonstrates that YouTube and other participatory media outlets have the potential to create these new locations by building alternative spaces. Until alternative discourses become available within the public sphere it is difficult to imagine a subjective position that is not bound by the dominant (Butler, 2011a). So, in the spirit of queer theory and post-structuralism, I don’t offer a conclusion, instead I propose that this research project exists as a site of becoming. That through participant engagement it worked to provoke action and disrupt oppressive structures, while working through a distinctly queer research process. As a performative moment this research project is simply a stepping stone in the creative process, calling to others to aggregate diverse stories and to embody our counter publics.

**Final Thoughts**

I leave the final thoughts to Ben and Maria as each one discusses what they learned from the workshop and why it matters.

Ben:
I think we learned that … we wanted to put … positive queer realities out there … we wanted them to come from normal, you know, seeming and behaving people. Not to say that none of us is in fact queer … in the sense of the term as weird, as strange or different … A lot of things that came up over and over again were around positivity … We talked connection to death, but we haven’t really mentioned that the stories should be [positive]… even if they are not necessarily happy the whole way through they are positive, or we learned, or we got through them, where now, today, we live beside them and we understand ourselves differently and better from them...

Pam:
Can I ask a question about that?

Ben:
Sure.
Pam:
Why do you think we came to the conclusion that we want to see positive stories?

Ben:
I would say partially because we put up a lot of videos that we react to negatively. I don’t think a lot of us brought in a video that’s like: “This video makes me happy to be queer and I just think its cool.” And we also, even if it was something that we were like: “This is pretty solidly awesome,” we were deconstructing where we found problematic things in them... and ultimately even the ones that we thought were, you know, quite good, or we reacted well to or positively to were about the difficult relationship with our, with my mother ... were addressed to straight people, were addressed to stop straight people from doing these specific things to us that they continue to do to us. Um... so, yeah, ok that is sort of why I think so. So, why does what we did matter, um... because you know, I like to say in very blasé way, yeah, it is two thousand thirteen, homophobia is over. Um... it's not. And I really like what you, [Pam], put in your email to us after the weekend was over; that it is also an act of resistance because anything that you do that’s creative, um, any behaviour that you are… that is not normative, um... is an act of resistance, whether you like to admit that or not. I will absolutely go out there and say, yeah, your performance in anyway that is not normative is an act of resistance. You don’t have to claim it, you can be like several of your, [Liz], acquaintances or my old roommate who are people who don’t care to bother, um... or you can be us and make it important and be like: We are going to make something of this. One is not better than the other, but the important thing about it is telling the stories, telling the stories entirely our way, our styles, our approaches to life and uh storytelling from different levels of experience…

(Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)

And finally here is Maria reflecting on the research project:

Maria:
What did we learn and why does it matter? I think that there are still so many stories that need to be told, so I feel like I learned that. Because I guess, I was at a point, like yeah, it is 2013, why does it matter? Or all of the stories are the same ... But there are so many stories to be told and maybe they are in these mundane little moments ... [There are] so many stories still to be told, that are untold right now. Um, and why does that matter. Um, I guess I felt a strong calling and um, connection to where is my place in that? What is my role in telling those stories or helping those stories to be told? Um, and I haven’t really engaged in the same way that I feel like a lot of us in the group identified being very active in political stuff or in queer anything. I feel like I haven’t been that person, um, for numerous different reasons ... Um, yeah. Why does it matter? Because I want a place! I want a place in telling those stories and in helping people tell those stories… Yep. (pause). I want to make a difference. Why does it matter, because it matters, it matters. (Video Transcript, June 26, 2013)
Maria’s insights concisely summarize why this research project matters: it matters because our stories can make a difference.

**Walk On…**

*Actor 1 moves across the room, hands out, palms raised, straight line, one foot right in front of the other, steps are full of purpose.*

*Actor 2 balancing unsure, falling side to side, turns around and stomps backwards, balances, turns around and stomps forward with authority.*

*Actor 3 moves in circles, forwards/backwards, collapsing, sideways, heavy breathing.*

*Actor 4 walking with purpose. An ally linked in one arm and the other hand over ear.*

*Actor 5 start/stop, look around, dance, start/stop, look around, unsure. One step at a time.*
References


