THESIS

WRITING TO ACT: DEVELOPING ACTIVIST

WRITING CURRICULA FOR LGBTQQIA COMMUNITY CENTERS

Submitted by

Stephanie L. Becker

Department of English

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Master's Committee:

    Advisor: Sarah Sloane

    Tobi Jacobi
    Maricela DeMirjyn

ABSTRACT

WRITING TO ACT: DEVELOPING ACTIVIST WRITING CURRICULA FOR

LGBTQQIA COMMUNITY CENTERS

Relying on the scholarship of Harriet Malinowitz, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Jonathan Alexander, among others, this thesis develops a theoretical framework that can inform curriculum designed for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally (LGBTQQIA) activist writing groups. The framework synthesizes scholarly and activist writing on queer pedagogy and community literacy and explores how this scholarship realizes some of the goals of queer activism. After a discussion of the author's positionality and chosen terminology, the thesis uses close textual readings and these theoretical syntheses to develop a new theory and stance that will guide or shape a writing curriculum that can be adapted to the needs and goals of specific LGBTQQIA writing groups. The thesis also includes interviews with two local activists, whose perspectives demonstrate the complicated and rhetorically situated nature of activist methods. Ultimately, this thesis suggests some ways that queer pedagogy can be translated into new activist potential in community-based writing groups using a sample activist curriculum.

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Chapter 1: Overview and Queering Positionality

It was a Wednesday evening at our site, a residential rehabilitation center for girls ages 13-17 in Northern Colorado, and sixteen of us sat in the living room, writing. Three of us, Colorado State University graduate students in the English program, were facilitating a creative writing workshop that the writers at the facility refer to as "poetry group therapy" and that we refer to as SpeakOut workshops. SpeakOut workshops are sponsored by CSU's Community Literacy Center (CLC). They are weekly creative writing workshops grounded in the theory of Community Literacy, an approach to community writing and community problem-solving that fosters social justice and change.

We provided the prompt: we would each write a "why" or "how" question that a young child might ask (such as why is the sun yellow, or why do owls sleep during the day). Then we would pass our question to someone else, who would answer it in a creative or unexpected way in the form of a poem or story.

One of the writers wrote the question, "Why does that girl dress like a boy?," a question she said she had heard kids ask about her. The other writer's response was that it was okay that not all girls looked the same. Another chimed in that it is *good* if not all girls look the same, and this led to a great discussion. We considered this to be an interesting exchange: to me it indicated that some of the writers at the facility wanted to engage in issues of gender presentation and difference through their writing.

I had been reading about queer composition pedagogy, an approach that makes central an examination of the discourses around sexuality (Malinowitz). Ideally, queer pedagogy is transformative, challenging heterosexism and heteronormativity and giving students a space to create a framework to engage in issues of sexuality. Further, through its grounding in critical pedagogy (Malinowitz 1995, Spurlin 2000), queer pedagogy can be a tool for change. Freire

advocates for *conscientizaçao*, or consciousness-raising, as part of critical pedagogy, explaining it allows participants "to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (17). If we consider queer pedagogy transformative in classroom settings, what about the potential of queer pedagogy in community settings? If a community writing group used the strategies of queer pedagogy, could it be one tool towards activist ends? The writers at our site made me wonder about the possibilities.

A few weeks later we crowded around the facility's laptop to watch slam poetry videos of Andrea Gibson, a poet and activist from Boulder who often challenges gender norms in her work. We listened to her poem "Andrea Gibson--A Letter to the Playground Bully from Andrea Age 8 ½," which she prefaced with some thoughts on bullying and the idea that young kids usually aren't bullied for their sexuality but for their gender expression. The poem includes the lines:

> Couldn't you just say, hey I'm having a bad day
>
> Instead of telling me I'm stupid or poor or that I dress like a boy
>
> Cause maybe I am a boy
>
> And a girl
>
> Maybe my name is Andrea Andrew
>
> So what? It is a fact
>
> That bumblebees have hair on their eyeballs
>
> And people should comb through everything they see

A few of the writers at the facility used this section of Gibson's poem to launch their own poems. It was interesting to see that bringing in even a short reference to sexuality and gender expression was something that created a space where sexuality was an acceptable topic for writing and for

discussion; based on points the writers brought up, we talked about using "gay" as a slur, the idea that terms like "gay" and "queer" took on different meanings depending on who used them and why, and the concept of reclaiming and appropriating slurs. Seeing the meaningful discussion that arose from engaging in issues of sexuality and sexual orientation in a community writing setting helped me envision the activist potential of a writing group devoted to these issues.

I am interested in the intersections between queer pedagogy, community writing, and activism, and in this thesis I explore ways in which combining these elements could be a tool for activist ends. I look at ways to adapt queer pedagogy for community settings, especially considering community writing's less defined power dynamics, different institutional expectations, and material constraints. Based on my adaptation and syntheses, I create a set of guidelines for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and Allies (LGBTQQIA) Community Centers interested in implementing writing groups based on queer composition pedagogical approaches. These guidelines include writing exercises and group configurations and are open-ended enough to be adapted for various community needs and activist goals. Interviews with activists inform these adaptations by sharing expertise on two activist goals, methods, and limitations.

Through close textual readings and theoretical syntheses, and development of new theory grounded in curricular suggestions, this thesis builds a theoretical framework for activist curricula that can be adapted to the needs and goals of specific LGBTQQIA writing groups. The thesis also includes interviews with two local activists, contextually and largely transcribed in Chapter 4. While the interviews are not the centerpiece of the thesis, the two activists' perspectives help demonstrate the complicated and rhetorically-situated nature of activist

methods. Ultimately, this thesis suggests ways that queer pedagogy can take on a new activist

potential within community writing groups.

Positionality

Feminist methodology calls for feminist researchers to position ourselves in terms of our

identity and privilege. Identifying one's positionality allows the researcher to make clear that she

speaks only for herself and from her specific intersection of identities, and to recognize the role

her privilege may have in her understanding of the issue she is researching. Nancy L. Deutsch

frames it this way:

> Feminist researchers have . . . highlighted the importance of positionality. The
> researcher's awareness of her or his own subjective experience in relation to that of her or
> his participants' is key to acknowledging the limits of objectivity. It recognizes the
> bidirectional nature of research. I am subject, object, and researcher. My participants are
> subjects, objects, and actors. (888-889)

It was difficult for me to decide how to approach a discussion of my position. Positionality can

also be read as a researcher trying to avoid accountability and criticism, using it as a disclaimer

for mistakes (Alcoff 25). In my case, it can also be read as a disidentification from the

LGBTQQIA community, explained below. Some of the criticisms of positioning oneself, which

are discussed in Chapter 3, include the possibility of navel-gazing and have the potential to

oversimplify complicated power relationships.

The following anecdote illustrates the problem of disidentification. In the preface to the

2008 edition of *Epistemology of the Closet*, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes her

effort to position herself in a 1985 women's studies class she taught at Amherst College and talks

about the results for the students:

> Introducing a section on lesbian issues, I apologized that as a non-lesbian I felt somewhat
> at a disadvantage in understanding this material. A trio of students turned up at my next

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office hour . . . and told me, firmly but in this case kindly, that whatever I did I mustn't do *that* again. By their account, however carefully I might have chosen my words, the meaning that came through to them as gay women was the clangorously phobic (in effect) disavowal of being one. (xvi)

In light of this and her queer scholarship, she goes on to note, "I found it increasingly hard to see how anyone would identify with [the term 'heterosexual'] except from eagerness to disavow its antonym" (xvii). In positioning myself, I was concerned that it would appear that I am distancing myself from solidarity with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Ally (LGBTQQIA) community, an issue that could be problematic.

Labeling myself straight also reinforces limiting categories—sexuality is often more complicated and fluid than identity labels like gay, straight, or transgender can encompass. Karen Kopelson claims identity politics, which these labels are often connected to, fails to recognize "these categories as highly unstable and open to resignification" (20). My hope is that my positioning myself will not be seen as reductive.

However, if I adopt the perspective that identity categories limit our understanding of sexuality and limit change, I am in danger of ignoring the institutionalized discrimination that faces sexual minorities and the privileges I benefit from as a mostly gender-norm-conforming cisgender[1] woman in a partnership with a mostly gender-norm-conforming cisgender man. It would be irresponsible for me to speak as an ally without addressing the limitations that creates.

In this case, I position myself as an ally, an activist, a white cisgender woman, a researcher, teacher, and a graduate student. My preferred pronoun is "she," which is the pronoun people use for me by default. In many of these identities, I am privileged. I do not say this to be reductive—I understand that intersections of identities create complicated power dynamics,

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[1]Evin Taylor defines cisgender: "The latin prefix 'cis,' loosely translated, means 'on this side,' while the prefix 'trans' is generally understood to mean 'change, crossing, or beyond.' Cisgender people are those whose gender identity, role, or expression is considered to match their assigned gender by societal standards. Transgender people are individuals who change, cross, or live beyond gender" (268).

especially in varied contexts. However, since I am talking about queer pedagogy and queer activism, it is important to me to be mindful of how my privilege might limit my perspective on activism as it relates to the LGBTQQIA community and make myself willing to be humbled, do my research, and learn through my blinders and my mistakes.

Much of the discourse on privilege originates from critical race theory, where the concept of white privilege has been an important concept for analyzing and understanding power. Many discussions of privilege cite Peggy McIntosh's 1988 essays "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" and "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." In the latter, McIntosh describes the invisible knapsack of privilege this way: "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks." She says that privileged people are often unaware of these advantages. They include things like visibility ("I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race," "I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin"), stereotyping ("I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race," "Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of my financial reliability"), and institutionalized discrimination ("If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race," "I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me").

McIntosh's model has been used to discuss other types of privilege as well. In this case, my heterosexual domestic partnership gives me straight privilege and the fact that my biological sex matches the gender I was assigned at birth, which in turn matches my gender identity and

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gender presentation, gives me cisgender privilege. Though my identity is more complicated than these two markers and my experience of privilege or discrimination varies based on context, I want to focus on these two forms of privilege as they are the most likely to create blind spots that would affect my work in this project.

The nature of privilege is that there are parts of it I am unable to see on my own. I draw upon the work of people who have used McIntosh's model to write about straight and cisgender privilege. Blogger J. Clarence Flanders, for example, writes about straight privilege for *The New Gay*, and while some of the privileges he talks about deal with visibility ("As a child growing up I am presented with figures of my orientation, in cartoons, children's book, and family movies," "Growing up I have an ample supply of role models I can look up to"), he says that these are becoming less pronounced as visibility of sexual minorities increases. Flanders also points out some privileges I had not given much thought before, such as "I don't have to tailor my travel plans to consider my orientation," and some that are quite marked, such as "I can be sure that if I need legal or medical assistance my orientation will not work against me," and "My orientation is not topic of discussion for politicians." He also brings up privileges I know I directly benefit from, such as "My orientation is accepted by all mainstream religions and all governments" and "I will never have to think about how my orientation will affect me while I am in school," (Flanders), something I try to be aware of as a teacher.

MIT's School of Architecture and Planning hosts a similar list on their website. Their heterosexual privilege checklist, which is based on McIntosh's white privilege list, has some overlap with Flanders' list but also includes some other privileges I benefit from, such as, "I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical or psychological consequences," and "I can walk in public with

my significant other and not have people double take or stare" (MIT). Privilege is not something that is necessarily harmful in and of itself—ideally, everyone would have access to these privileges. The reason it is important for me as a researcher to think about these privileges is to help me understand how my understanding of queer activism and the needs of the LGBTQQIA community may be skewed by the fact that I have not had to think about these needs in the same way.

I am also a member of a privileged identity group as a cisgender woman. Evin Taylor's chapter in *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, "Cisgender Privilege: On the Privileges of Performing Normative Gender," lists cisgender privileges in the form of questions. For example, "Are you able to assume that your genitals conform relatively closely to portrayals of 'normal' bodies?" "Can you smile at a young child without their parents scorning or explaining you to the child?" "Are incidental parts of your identity defined as a mental illness?" and "Does the state of your genitals cause you to fear violence if they are discovered?" (269-272). Being mindful of these (very striking) privileges help me remember what is at stake in a heterosexist and cissexist culture in ways that I have not experienced.

Using these articles as jumping-off points for understanding my own privilege and how it might impact my perspective for this project, I realize my privileges as a cisgender, heterosexual-partnered woman include specific things I need to be aware of. For example, I can choose when to engage in issues of sexuality. As someone whose sexuality is not questioned and is considered the default, I am not impacted by LGBTQQIA issues as someone whose identity is being attacked or put under the microscope. It is important for me to hold myself accountable to remain

engaged in activism. Further, since homonormativity[2] has made the perspectives of transgender, intersex, and those not easily labeled more invisible than those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in many cases, I must be aware that privileges such as never having my gender presentation and sexuality conflated, never feeling pressured to explain my identity, and always feeling there is a restroom I am allowed to use[3] might limit my perspective on these issues.

Though there is a danger in speaking about the issues of a group I am only marginally a member of (as the "A" for ally on the tail end of LGBTQQIA), which is addressed in more depth below, one of the reasons I feel compelled to pursue a queer activist project relates to two of the heterosexual privileges Flanders brings up: "I can worry about homophobia and not be seen as self-interested or self-seeking," and "If I declare that there is asexual orientation prejudicial situation at hand my orientation will lend me more credibility than a person of one of the other orientations" (Flanders). Though in many ways I feel my orientation gives me less legitimacy to speak to issues facing the LGBTQQIA community, it is worth nothing that everyone could benefit from a less heterosexist society, where there will be more room for varied gender and sexual expression. Though it is a complicated task, I would like to *use* my privilege to help *undermine* it. My position is, however, necessarily complicated, potentially sticky, and in some ways unavoidably problematic. Because I believe in the activist potential of this project, however, I plan to pursue it, albeit as reflexive about my position as possible.

Linda Alcoff's article "The Problem of Speaking for Others" is a synthesis of various perspectives and positions on the problem of speaking for others. Her article is a helpful

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[2]Kath Browne defines homonormativity as "the normalisation and hierarchisation of particular forms of homosexuality within particular sexualised, classed, gendered and ethnic norms" (886). This can mean a privilege of gender normative gay men, lesbians, and people who are bisexual over people who are not gender conforming.
[3]This is a daily issue for some non-cisgender people. The website *Transgender at Work* describes it this way: "Transgender people are sometimes denied access to the most basic of public accomodations: the public restroom. A person in transition, or temporarily crossdressed, occasionally finds they cannot safely use the restroom matching their birth sex, yet if they use the restroom matching their presentation, they can be arrested" ("Restroom access").

framework for examining my own motives in undertaking this project, so she is quoted heavily in this section. First, Alcoff establishes that "There is a strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" and notes that this is more marked in cases where a person with privilege speaks for a group that is less privileged (6-7). She explains, "the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (7). This is an important risk to be aware of, especially working within a feminist methodology. To work towards minimizing this risk, I use Alcoff's "four sets of interrogatory practices that are meant to help evaluate possible and actual instances of speaking for," to consider the impact of my position on the efficacy of this project. First, this section details some of the other responses to this problem she discusses.

Alcoff raises the related questions, "if I don't speak for those less privileged than myself, am I abandoning my political responsibility to speak out against oppression, a responsibility incurred by the very fact of my privilege?" and "Is my greatest contribution [to a social movement] to move over and get out of the way?" These questions lead her to discuss what she calls the "retreat" position, or the unwillingness to speak for anyone but the self. While she believes there are valid reasons to adopt the retreat position in many situations, it can also be "a retreat into a narcissistic yuppie lifestyle in which a privileged person takes no responsibility for her society whatsoever" (17). This criticism of the retreat position does not justify my project on queer activism, but does help me think about the stakes of not engaging in queer activism as a feminist and an ally. It is one of the reasons Alcoff advocates speaking for movements that don't directly benefit the speaker in some cases.

In these cases, Alcoff favors Gayatri Spivak's concept of "speaking to" over "speaking for." In speaking to, "the intellectual neither abnegates his or her discursive role nor presumes an authenticity of the oppressed but still allows for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative" (23). To do this, I do not present my community writing group guidelines as prescriptive but as experimental, hopefully contributing to dialogue among queer activists about writing groups as a potential tool.

Postmodern Queer Theory and Identity Politics

Karen Kopelson's article "Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary: 'Reconstructed Identity Politics' for a Performative Pedagogy" attempts to grapple with an important issue within queer pedagogy and theory: the unanswered question of how to deconstruct binary understandings of sexuality and gender without ignoring the social reality of discrimination and violence against LGBTQQIA people.

Queer theory often refers to Judith Butler's performativity, which says that rather than a fixed identity, sexuality is something repeatedly performed and open to re-interpretation. I like drag queen RuPaul's explanation of performativity: "We're born naked, and the rest is drag." Butler's theory that sexual orientation is constructed has informed a number of texts that critique versions of queer pedagogy that they view as dependent on the idea that sexuality is static. Kopelson says a postmodern critique of identity-based approaches is that "[they] fail to disturb hegemonic systems of domination" (19). She cites Henry Giroux, who says identity-based approaches (to anything—not just sexuality) is that they do not fulfill the often-discussed idea that inclusion is not enough. His critique is that identity politics does not seek to dismantle a flawed system of power structures.

Some queer theorists believe that by contrast, queer pedagogy that is both performative and postmodern creates productive dissonance that facilitates radical change (Britzman, ctd. in Kopelson 20). They believe that it opens space for difference within identity groups rather than promoting the idea that the experiences of sexual minorities are the same. Many of these theorists prefer to use the term "queer" over acronyms, which can imply fixed identity positions.

There are activists who feel the same way. In "Identity, Schmidentity," a chapter in Bornstein and Bergman's *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*, Telyn Kusalik talks about identity politics as the main political paradigm of "radical queer subculture" and how this paradigm does not resonate with them. Kusalik says, "For many reasons, I have concluded that identity is not central to my thinking. First, I am perfectly comfortable, in fact more comfortable, not choosing a fixed identity position; my own gender in particular is still mysterious to me" (55). With this perspective in mind, I realize that my use of LGBTQQIA could be alienating for people who feel the way Kusalik does, and that is not my intention. It would also be problematic for me to subscribe uncritically to postmodern queer theory.

Those who believe identity politics still has a place in queer activism and scholarship say that while the postmodern queer perspective is ideal, we are not ready to discard identity categories in a society that still discriminates based on those categories. We need those terms to talk about power, privilege, and discrimination. Harriet Malinowitz says that while identity categories do not reflect "any underlying truth about human identity . . . [they are] a 'truth' about our culture. Recognizing that the categories we exist within . . . are social constructions should not lead us to a perception of these things as somehow lesser in their effects . . . the products of our collective social imagination receive particular rewards, punishments, license, restrictions,

affirmations, and violations in the social world" (27). Malinowitz's concept is powerfully

illustrated by trans woman Julia Serano in "Performance Piece," her chapter in *Gender Outlaws*:

> Look, I know that many contemporary queer folks and feminists embrace mantras like
> "all gender is performance," "all gender is drag," and "gender is just a construct." They
> seem empowered by the way these sayings give the impression that gender is merely a
> fiction. A façade. A figment of our imaginations, endlessly mutable and malleable. And
> of course, this is a convenient strategy, provided that you're not a trans woman who lacks
> the means to change her legal sex to female, and who thus runs the very real risk of being
> locked up in an all-male jail cell. Provided that you're not a trans man who has to
> navigate the discrepancy between his male identity and female history during job
> interviews and first dates. (86)

Serano's and Kusalik's perspectives on identity politics and queer theory are opposing but

simultaneously valid. They illustrate that queer theory and the language around it is fraught and

that the linguistic choices I make must be well-considered, even as I know I may draw valid

criticism. I realize that my perspectives and language choices could invalidate others'

experience, which is why I choose my language carefully.

I also recognize the limitations of any language I choose to use. Language can be

transformative, but I do not believe language alone can be transformative—that is part of why I

present activist writing groups as only one activist tool rather than *the* activist tool everyone

should be using.

On Terminology

When I handed an early draft of a thesis proposal to a friend of mine, someone who is an

ally to the LGBTQQIA community and whose opinion I value greatly, she told me I really

needed to find a way to deal with this unwieldy acronym. I understand that an eight-letter

acronym can create dissonance, even for an ally, but I believe that can be a productive

dissonance. For me, it reminds me of my privilege—I've never experienced a situation where the

gracefulness of an acronym in a text has been prioritized over the acknowledgement of my existence. What would it mean for me to shorten that acronym? If I just said LGBT, I would reinforce homonormativity and essentially erase from my discussion people who are questioning, people who call themselves queer, intersex people, and people who may be within any of these categories but also consider themselves allies.

However, using this acronym, even in its entirety, is not without its problems. As queer theorists have pointed out, such acronyms do not include everyone. There are people who do not consider themselves heterosexual but do not identify with any of these categories. There are people who find these categories limiting, or who identify with more than one of the categories, depending on the day. There is the idea that larger, revolutionary change is not possible as long as we rely on labels to talk about sexuality. Kopelson says identity politics "fails to disturb hegemonic systems of domination," because it relies on extant power structures, whereas, "Queer theory challenges us to move beyond rather than into the governing structures of available, and oppositional, designations for sexuality" (19). There is validity to that critique, but as a person who primarily identifies as an ally, it would be problematic for me to over-rely on the word queer, as discussed below.

One of the other problems with the acronym is that its order may suggest hierarchy to some, and based on its order, a hierarchy that reinforces homonormativity. If I were to rearrange the acronym each time I used it I would be creating an artificial solution to the real problem of homonormativity. This relates to the idea that while language can be transformative it is not a silver bullet. I also deliberated about how I would use the A in LGBTQQIA—if I am talking about institutional discrimination, straight allies are rarely included in the same way based on this part of their identity alone. However, not all allies are straight—a lesbian can be an ally to a

trans woman, a queer-identified individual can be an ally to someone who is bisexual, and a gay man can be an ally to another gay man. Ally relationships can occur among and across many types of power relationships. Because of this, I leave the "a" on the acronym when I talk about discrimination with the caveat that someone who only identifies with the "a" is less likely to have experienced it.

One response to some of the issues outlined above is to use the term "queer," which encompasses more complex and fluid gender and sexual identities. When he was teaching a 300-level course on social justice, Kevin Kumashiro, author of *Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Antioppressive Pedagogy*, asked the students to read an article he had written on anti-oppressive education. Though he had planned to discuss the themes more broadly, many of the students' responses to the article reported being stuck on his use of the term queer. He says the essay did explain "queer has been claimed and appropriated by some people to emphasize a conscientious distancing from what is considered 'normal' and a sense of self-empowerment" but that the students were still "offended that [he] used a term that they had been taught was 'politically incorrect'" (5). Kumashiro explains his use of queer further, saying, "while it discomforts people because it reminds us of bigotry and hatred, it is exactly this oppressive history that gives the term its activist, in-your-face quality" (10). He says the term is "a reclaiming of the terms of their identities, and a feeling of self-empowerment" (10).

I do not intend to avoid the use of the term queer for the same reason Kumashiro suspects his students were uncomfortable—he feels many of them were avoiding a discomfort that required them to think about the existence of heterosexism and their possible complicity in it, and I agree that the term can create a productive dissonance. My concern is with using a reclaimed term that was once a slur—and still is a slur in many contexts—that could never have

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been used meaningfully against me. Though Kumashiro points out that "the term queer activist is expanding to include those who do not identify as [LGBTQQIA] but nonetheless challenge heterosexism and gender oppression," I feel the term queer is not mine to reclaim. While I do agree with many queer theory critiques of identity politics and its language, I have chosen to use the acronym in cases when I talk about the LGBTQQIA community and the term queer when I talk about fields that embrace and use the term, such as queer pedagogy and queer activism. My solution in terms of language choices is not perfect, but I don't think there is a perfect solution— the problematic nature of heteronormativity and heterosexism and the way they have affected our language, makes many terms surrounding sexuality fraught and all potentially hurtful.

Though I do not present this project as a solution to heterosexism by any means, I do believe it is one potential tool that activists and LGBTQQIA community centers can use to transformative ends. This is partially because I believe in the importance of LGBTQQIA centers themselves—though their resources are sometimes limited, they can serve to create communities for LGBTQQIA people who would not otherwise have them. I think about a man who lived in an isolated, rural community where he had no sense of acceptance or support, and who regularly drove over 500 miles to a LGBTQQIA Community Center to use their services, one of those being a writing group. If more LGBTQQIA community centers are able to implement these kinds of groups, especially informed by transformative queer pedagogy, my hope is that writing groups will be available for more activists to share goals and stories.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature: Community Writing, Queer Pedagogy and Activism

To create cogent guidelines for LGBTQQIA centers to form writing groups, it is important to create a framework that will inform the goals and practices of these groups. This chapter synthesizes the literature on community writing, queer pedagogical theory, and queer activism towards building that framework.

Though there are points of discrepancy between these bodies of work, with adjustments, community writing and queer pedagogy can both be applied towards activist ends. Further, queer pedagogy has to be adjusted for material and other circumstances connected with community writing. These include issues such as varied school experience and participation, access to resources, and the effects of discrimination, the implications of which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Community Writing

Community writing scholarship is informed by community literacy and by a critique that scholars tend to ignore what is happening outside of the academy. In "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition," Anne Ruggles Gere calls on compositionists to "listen to the signals that come through our classroom from the world outside." She criticizes the way we write our history. She says, "we have neglected to recount the history of composition in other contexts; we have neglected compositions extracurriculum." Gere talks about two community writing groups, a rural one that meets in Lansing, Iowa and an urban one in San Francisco's Tenderloin District.

Beyond the personal benefits of community writing groups, of which Gere says the two she discusses are a "tiny portion," she points out the activist potential of these groups—many

include as part of their purpose to "solve local problems" and "alter the material conditions of their lives." She talks about how these groups have raised awareness and funding for homelessness, formed a Black History study group, and promoted organic produce.

Gere's work is part of a tradition of Community Literacy, a field of study sometimes associated with composition. Community Literacy is a field that seeks to promote "inquiry and social change" in communities surrounding universities (Flower 16). Its definition of literacy and literate practices is fairly broad and fluid: it includes any set of competencies an individual or community develops in order to thrive and communicate in a cultural context. This can include abilities to do things such as read books, communicate with and/or about resource-holding gatekeepers, navigate social situations, use a computer, know how to advocate for social change, or write poetry. Community Literacy scholar Linda Flower, like Gere, categorizes community literacy as a tool for change. In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement,* Flower talks about how community literacy projects themselves take on many forms, including from "political theorizing about language and education . . . designing basic writing and [English as a Second Language] instruction around critical consciousness, to initiating community-based creative writing programs, to organizing students and colleagues to take literate action on live issues" (17). Community Literacy projects often have a more specific focus but broader methods than community writing groups. For example, in their article "Community Literacy: A Rhetorical Model for Personal and Public Inquiry," Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, and Linda Flower describe a community-based project to open up dialogue and create solutions to widespread landlord-tenant disputes in a Pittsburgh neighborhood. Writing was one of the tools they used. Higgins, Long, and Flower explain that writing can be a valuable way to clarify social problems:

> Narrative [writing] is a valuable tool for eliciting stakeholders' situated knowledge, [which] is grounded in lived experience; people often encode and express this knowledge

through various forms of narrative—anecdote, dramatic reenactments of a problem, or personal stories they share . . . Furthermore, narrative . . . [can turn] individual knowledge into a communal resource . . . Narrative also has a persuasive power that can help audience identify with the teller's perspective in a way that abstract and generalized positions or claims do not. (21)

However, they are aware of the limitations of writing as a tool to solve specific problems. "Personal stories alone don't necessarily support intercultural inquiry," they say. "Narratives that elaborate on stakeholders' reasoning, social positioning, and life contexts generate new information and propel discussion that can move people beyond personal expression to public problem solving" (21). It may be useful to think of community writing as a tool towards community literacy in the same way it can be a tool towards activism: while it is not a cure-all for social injustice, it can play an important role in activist movements. Community writing groups can be informed by the critical goals of community literacy.

It is important to note criticism of this approach. In her important book *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition*, Paula Mathieu argues than many service learning and community literacy programs are designed to benefit the institution that created them (school, university, nonprofit) rather than the community members, and that the priorities of the community members are often treated as secondary. One community literacy tactic Flower uses, intercultural inquiry, is an approach Mathieu sees as contributing to this problem. Mathieu says intercultural inquiry, despite being part of "some of the best work advocating a greater voice for community partners [,] remains rooted in student concerns" (93). She talks about the literacy project described by Flower in "Intercultural Inquiry and the Transformation of Service," in which Carnegie Mellon University students applied this technique with teenagers in urban communities. The CMU students developed inquiries about community problems and invited rival inquiries from the teenagers. Mathieu notes that the Carnegie Mellon student is the one who

sets the agenda. She says, "while this approach does put the ideas and wisdom of the community squarely into the project, the starting point for the inquiries remains the individual student and his assumptions. It's unclear to what extent the participating teens want to discuss [these specific] issues" (94). There is some hubris in the idea, grounded within intercultural inquiry, that the institutional representative will come into a community and engage in problem-solving for that community. As Mathieu says, "the stakes of public work are broader than classroom concerns" (92).

This critique impacts this project for two reasons—my positioning in the project itself and in its application if it is used at LGBTQQIA community centers. For the former concern, my position is problematic. I take the position of Lorie Goodman, who Mathieu quotes as saying, "when we [compositionists and researchers] shift the scene of composition . . . into 'the community,' we move beyond the realm of our own expertise. . . . Our actions have consequences. Our grounds for action must remain always under revision" (qtd in Mathieu 93). My grounds are not as an authority on the needs of any community, but on approaches to composition and community writing. This project is not an authoritative guide to activist writing groups; it is a potential application of a synthesis of specific literature that activists can adapt to their own ends.

There are ways that organizers of community writing groups can heed Goodman's suggestions as well. Material and social factors may get in the way of the ideal configuration, where community activists—part of the local community and the LGBTQQIA community—set the agenda for activist writing groups. For example, there are many communities in the US that do not have LGBTQQIA centers. To be aware of the stakes of their work, organizers of community writing groups must take into account the goals and needs of their members who

come from communities without these resources. Further, within the groups, organizers should be aware of the implications of homonormativity and the complicated intersections of identity that form power relationships within any group of people and may create further marginalization.

I focus on Community Literacy scholarship even in the face of Mathieu's and Goodman's concerns because of its pedagogical grounding in transformative critical theory, which could be a helpful approach for activists.

Origins of Community Literacy

Community Literacy was born out of Critical Literacy, the field of Composition Studies related to Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy. Critical pedagogy, based on Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, focuses on Freire's adult education efforts in Brazil, where he worked towards liberatory education that does not limit students to maintain the political status quo. Freire rejects what he calls the banking model of education, where knowledge is viewed as a commodity that teachers hold and can deposit into students. Freire says, "In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. . . . The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world"(53-54). Within critical pedagogy, students make knowledge and transform culture rather than learn what to think. As an extension of Freire's ideas, critical literacy and community literacy reject understandings of literacy that necessarily privilege skills valued by the academy and that may be designed to uphold the status quo rather than effect change. Critical pedagogue Ira Shor says:

> Critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development. This kind of literacy--words rethinking worlds, self dissenting in

society—connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity. (1)

Further, Flower says, "this community branch of critical literacy is more closely identified with the tools of rhetoric . . . where literacy gave a public voice to oppressed[4] people and a tool to reinterpret their shared reality in their own words" (18). Flower's focus on the critical demonstrates the goals of community literacy. This is one version of how community literacy can enact change.

Challenges and Unanswered Questions in the Field of Community Writing

Material Limitations on Community Writing

Community programs are often subject to material constraints in terms of access and resources that make planning different than it would be for most university classroom settings. According to Bruce Horner, for writing teachers, concerns about materiality can include (and this is a small portion of his list): "a host of socioeconomic conditions contributing to writing production, such as the availability of certain kinds of schooling, number of students in writing classes . . . access to time and quiet . . . physical classroom conditions . . . and office and library resources" (xviii-xix). When a learning environment is affected by material constraints such as the ones listed above, the constraints present additional difficulties for teachers and community writers, who may be limited by time and budget constraints.

The stability of programming budgets for LGBTQQIA centers vary, but many may face constraints. Budget constraints may make it more difficult to promote and continue a writing

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[4] Flower's use of the term "oppressed people" is problematic based on its reduction of people to one perceived power dynamic.

group. Community participants may face material constraints, as well. I think of the man mentioned in the introduction who had to drive five to six hours to get to his nearest LGBTQQIA center. In parts of the country where access to LGBTQQIA resources is scarce, situations like his, wherein the long drive prevented him from attending events regularly. Lack of easy accessibility might make the turnover in writing groups affect long-term community building and collaborations.

There may be additional material limitations concerning school anxiety, related to Horner's point about "availability of certain kinds of schooling. "Because writing groups are open to the community," he writes, "participants are likely to have varying school experiences and uneven access to positive education experiences." Gere develops Horner's point by noting that the composition classroom is alienating for some—"Within classroom walls," she says, "composition frequently serves a gatekeeping function by providing an initiation rite that determines whether newcomers can master . . . academic discourse." Within the narrower goals of academic discourse, the writing of those who did not have access to academic discourse early in life may be devalued. This kind of alienation leads some people to believe their writing is not worthwhile, whereas outside-the-classroom writing groups can offer affirmation that, as Gere says, "their experience is worth expressing," and, in an activist context, potentially transformative.

A further consideration involving negative school experience for queer activist writing groups may be institutionalized heterosexism and the historical invisibility of LGBTQQIA subjectivities in school settings. "In current-traditional homophobic culture," says Harriet Malinowitz, author of *Textual Orientations: Lesbian and Gay Students and the Making of Discourse Communities*, "[t]hat is, the vast so-called 'mainstream' space occupied by those who

haven't evacuated to hip, queer-friendly enclaves—some age-old problems remain in force for the lesbian or gay student writer." Malinowitz describes the tension between pedagogical demands to be "authentic" and the demands of homophobic society to "grasp at an adopted subject position so tenaciously that one becomes quite unmoored from the matrices that yield one's own" (35). Kevin Kumashiro points out that oppressive education is furthered not only when teachers ignore homophobia and LGBTQQIA subjectivities, but also when they ignore heterosexual privilege and assume that heterosexuality is the norm. "Disrupting oppression requires more than preventing harmful interpersonal interactions," he says. "Oppression consists not only of marginalizing the Other; it also consists of privileging the 'normal.' By focusing on the negative experiences of the Other this approach implies that the Other is the problem: Without the Other, schools would not be oppressing anyone" (37). Without acknowledging power systems and the schools' participation in it, he argues, schools oppress LGBTQQIA students further. This can lead to internalized stigma. These kinds of school experiences can further writing anxiety as well as give people the sense that their perspective doesn't matter. School anxiety may be furthered by experiences of violence. Malinowitz cites a 1991 study by Gary David Comstock that finds "one quarter of the victims of antigay/antilesbian violence reported school itself (college, senior, or junior high) as the site of the assault, and lesbians and gays report almost three times as many incidents of crimes against them in school settings as do victims of crime in general" (112). This is just one snapshot of the school experiences LGBTQQIA people may bring to a writing group, but it is worth considering because school experiences, among other material factors, are likely to influence the ways people approach writing in community settings as well.

It is important for community writing groups to discuss these material limitations and find their best solutions for working around them. Some of the problems in community writing are theoretical disagreements that can still affect writing groups in concrete, material ways.

Creative and Critical in Community Literacy

Like many Community Literacy scholars, Flower characterizes Community Literacy as transformative, connecting it with pedagogies in which "[writers] become conscious of how one's language and identity have been historically and socially constructed within specific power relations," (17). In practice, community groups often focus on creative writing in the form of poetry, personal narrative, or fiction. As stated above, Higgins, Long, and Flower argue that personal narrative is not enough to support critical goals like intercultural inquiry, and they call for community literacy groups to move "beyond personal expression" (21). One may view creative writing as a form of healing or catharsis that might quell the kind of productive anger that might lead to activism. The tension between the critical goals and creative practice of community writing groups, however, may be linked to a false binary between creative and critical, political and personal.

Arguments surrounding composition pedagogies are one way to examine how this binary might affect the way we view writing. Pedagogical theory is complicated when it is applied to community settings. Factors such as flattened power structures, differing goals, lessened or different institutional restrictions and expectations, and writers with different needs alter the usefulness and limitations of classroom pedagogies. Pedagogies that have one outcome in an institutionally more rigid classroom look different in what Gere calls "[t]he relaxed physical environment of the extracurriculum" (1091). For the purposes of this analysis, expressivist and

critical and social constructionist pedagogies are considered limited. My sense is that while these pedagogies are viewed as in-conflict in the classroom, writing groups, particularly LGBTQQIA writing groups informed by queer theory, provide a useful space to deconstruct this binary with awareness of the limitations of both.

Expressivism, sometimes called expressionism, is a theory of writing pedagogy popularized in the 1960s and '70s most famously by compositionists Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray. Expressivism has been critiqued from a critical standpoint, but expressivist rhetorics and methods remain popular in some classrooms and community writing settings.

In response to traditional writing pedagogies that emphasized grammar and mechanical correctness, many expressivists in the 1960s began to emphasize writing as a process that included mistakes and personal voice and expression, much like creative writing. These theorists, situated in a time of political upheaval, presented writing as a way to give students voice and power in a time they may have felt theirs was limited (Harris 26). This concept of writing as a tool for power continued as a central theme in expressivist thought. In his opening "Note to the Reader" in his 1981 book *Writing With Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*, Elbow foregrounds power as a key concept: "Writing with power means getting power over words and readers . . . . But writing with power also means getting power over yourself and over the writing process . . . not feeling stuck or helpless or intimidated" (viii).

As a means of gaining access to this power, another central concept to expressivism is writing in an authentic voice. In *Telling Writing*, Ken Macrorie says, "all good writers speak in honest voices and tell the truth . . . . This is the first requirement for good writing: truth . . . . a connection between the things written about, the words used in the writing, and the author's experience in a world she knows well" (15). Similarly, in the chapter "How to Get Power

Through Voice," Elbow describes authentic writing in this way: "Look for real voice and realize it is there in everyone waiting to be used . . . you are looking for something mysterious and hidden. There are no outward linguistic characteristics to point to real voice. Resonance . . . is all there is" (312).

The idea of authentic voice is connected to the expressivist emphasis on the authentic self. Self-discovery is the central goal in an expressivist classroom, and it is the key to resisting received knowledge. In his critique of expressivism, compositionist James Berlin notes, "[Within expressivism] it is . . . only the individual, acting alone and apart from others, who can determine the existant, the good, and the possible" (486). Berlin quotes expressivist Donald Murray as saying, "the writer is on a search for himself" (486). Overall, the focus of expressivist pedagogy and writing is inward.

This critique is a point of tension between approaches to writing instruction, and it is a critique worthy of attention for writing groups that have activist goals. If the writing done in the groups, even with activist intent, focuses solely on the self, its impact may be limited. Along these lines, Some compositionists have been critical of expressivist pedagogy for a number of reasons. Some of the criticisms have come from social constructionists such as Bartholomae and Bizzell, who argue that good writing is based on discourse communities and that not initiating students into academic discourse communities is doing them a disservice (Fishman and McCarthy 648). This critique is less applicable to many community settings, where fluency in academic discourse is not the goal.

More applicable to this context, but related, James Berlin argues that expressivism "serves the forces of political and economic conservatism" because it does not encourage students to engage in the political, but only in individual feelings. Berlin notes that within

expressivism, "political change can only be considered by individuals and in individual terms," a concept that limits collective action (486).

At its origin, expressivism gained popularity as a response to hegemonic political forces. Berlin notes that early expressivists believed that "experience of the authoritarian institutional setting can be resisted by providing students with concrete experiences that alter political consciousness through challenging official versions of reality" (485). He says that over time, and as the ideas of more mainstream compositionists Elbow and Murray became widely accepted, they continued to discuss these ideas, but that they were limited by the emphasis on the individual. For example, in *A Writer Teaches Writing*, Donald Murray says, "The student lives in a plastic, mass-produced world." The solution to this problem that he presents is that "the writing course can give him a chance . . . to be a craftsman" (72).

Berlin argues that this rhetoric can be co-opted; though on the surface it appears to be anti-capitalist, it easily supports capitalist values such as initiative. "The ruling elites in business, industry, and government are most likely to nod in assent to the ideology inscribed in expressionistic rhetoric" he says (487).

There are further criticisms of expressivism when it is applied to LGBTQQIA students. In "Literacy and the Lesbian/Gay Learner," Ellen Louise Hart points out that though Elbow claims freewriting shouldn't "send any ripples" (qtd. in Hart), a student who identifies as LGBTQQIA has a legitimate reason to be concerned with "ripples" from the teacher or students in the class. An LGBTQQIA student in the classroom asked to freewrite may feel the need to censor herself, which defeats the purpose of freewriting. Though this may not have the same impact in a community setting where writing is not evaluated, experience with this kind of writing in non-safe spaces may influence someone's level of comfort with this kind of writing.

Issues with expressivism are of particular importance when considering writers in community settings, who are often members of marginalized identity groups who may benefit from more critical literacies, as argued by Freire. It is important to consider the limitations of creative writing as they may be linked to expressivism. If a writing group with activist goals focuses on creative writing that is purely personally reflective, possibly cathartic, and focused on only language or voice, this may limit the activist impact of that group's work.

That is not to say that this kind of writing has no place in an activist LGBTQQIA writing group at all. Community writing groups can be seen as a unique site for blurring the boundaries between critical and creative. Some of the critiques of expressivism in the classroom, even as they pertain to LGBTQQIA students in particular (Sloane 1993, Malinowitz 1995) are mitigated by the fact that their writing is not being evaluated by a teacher with institutional power. Because of this, community writing groups can engage in some expressivist-type creative writing, which despite limitations discussed above, can have some benefit for writers in the community.

For example, creative writing, which is sometimes more accessible than writing that appears critical on its surface, can be a useful response to the previously discussed issue of school anxiety based on negative school experiences. Elbow presents expressivism's accessible focus on the personal as an antidote to school-induced discomfort with writing, acknowledging its pressure: "We feel more culpable for our written foolishness than for what we say; we have been so fully graded, corrected, given feedback on our mistakes in our writing; and we are usually trying to get our words to conform to some (ill-understood) model of 'good writing'" (305). Outside of this pressure, writers may feel more comfortable sharing personal writing.

Colorado State University's Community Literacy Programs are a good example of how these approaches can be used simultaneously. The website for SpeakOut! writing workshops for

incarcerated writers lists both creative and critical goals. For example, while encouraging the writers to look inwards with goals such as, "To provide a safe and encouraging space for writers to experiment with language and communication as a tool for understanding their lives and their relationship to the larger world" and "To create opportunities for writers to recognize the value of their own experience," both goals which have individual benefits for each writer, they also have activist, social justice-based goals, such as, "To give incarcerated and at-risk populations a public voice and a sense of their importance and value in society through the circulation of the bi-annual SpeakOut! Journal" and "To increase public awareness on issues of incarceration and social justice" ("Community Literacy Center Key Initiatives"). Though these writers are restricted by complicated institutional restraints, the community offers writing groups a setting where they are able to produce personal writing without being evaluated and use that writing for larger-reaching social justice projects such as the journal. These goals may not be possible in a classroom, where personal writing and open activism are less accepted.

Within the unique framework of community writing where boundaries between creative and critical are blurred, LGBTQQIA writing groups can engage in text production that draws on the benefits of both, creating writing that is personal and creative while being activist and transformative. For example, queer pedagogues have pointed to the potential of hybrid texts to challenge heteronormativity and other cultural erasures. In "Writing Inqueeries: Bodies, Queer Theory, And an Experimental Writing Class," Jennifer DiGrazia and Michael Boucher talk about the ways in which they attempted to queer their own writing class, a writing workshop on queer inquiry. They say:

> In order to [queer the act of writing], we envisioned complicating traditional divisions
> and prescriptive literary genres . . . by recombining genres such as poetry and expository
> writing, fiction and autobiography and by blurring the lines between public and private
> writing, we questioned what possibilities for representing selves and cultures would

emerge . . . we saw queer texts as purposefully provocative, edgy, and meant to destabilize the audience's assumptions about what is "normal" about gender, sexual identity, race and/or class categories. In other words, a queer text, topically and stylistically, somehow asks the audience to acknowledge the contingency of norms. (26-27)

An example of a queered text is a zine, which DiGrazia and Boucher say one of their students produced as a final project. They talk about the reflection the student had on the hybrid genre project:

> In defining his project, he states, "I'm not sure exactly what I have produced: a quasi-autobiographical account of me, something that begins to articulate my queerness, my struggles with such, and how I am searching for conclusion. A mix of memory, dialogue, narrative and rant, this is the closest I have come to articulating myself through text." The zine was multivoiced, a mixture of autobiography, photography, poetry, dialogue, a way to represent different, fragmented pieces of himself. Fragments of sentences, fragments of photos of himself capture, through pieces, what somehow cannot be represented as whole. (30)

While, as this example shows, queer pedagogues have successfully queered the concept of the genre in the classroom, it is more challenging based on institutional expectations, where teachers may struggle with how to evaluate a hybrid-genre project. LGBTQQIA writing groups can engage in the production of these kinds of texts, embracing both the personal and transformative components of such texts.

Gere talks about both personal and community benefits from community writing: writers in the Tenderloin district writing group find that "their experience is worth expressing," writers in Lansing, Iowa find that the writing group "enhances their self-esteem," and both groups "discipline their participants to hone their crafts as writers" (76). Gere explains that public readings help strengthen community relationships. Alongside these creative benefits, Gere says that there are critical, activist ones. "In addition to changing the quality of personal relationships," she says, workshop participants often use writing to alter the material conditions of their lives" (77). She talks about the Tenderloin district group raising funds for activism on

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behalf of homeless people and the development of a Black History study group. These community outcomes point to the potential community writing has for catalyzing change. In order to do so for the LGBTQQIA community, writing groups can integrate approaches specifically designed to transform cultural perspectives of sexuality.

Queer Pedagogy

In the cultural context Harriet Malinowitz calls "the gay nineties"—a period of increased media visibility of gay and lesbian people and of political and academic discussion of issues such as sexual orientation as a civil rights category—scholars like Malinowitz noted that pedagogy had not caught up. Though identity issues had begun to transform the way many teachers and scholars approached composition pedagogy, scholars had not yet argued for examining sexual identity as a discourse-forming subjectivity in the same way they examined gender, race, and class. Malinowitz calls for a pedagogy in which "the complexities of lesbian and gay subjectivities can enter public discourse" (7).

Though its definition may vary based on context, I use queer pedagogy to mean pedagogies in which an examination of LGBTQQIA subjectivities is central, and in which widespread sexual literacy and wider cultural understanding of LGBTQQIA discourse are goals. In *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies*, Jonathan Alexander defines sexual literacy as "learning how to talk fluently and critically about sex and sexuality" and "being able to address sexuality issues intelligently, critically, and even comfortably" (2). It is important to note that queer pedagogy is more than a strategy for inclusiveness. While a number of texts urge teachers and scholars to be inclusive of LGBTQQIA writers and students, inclusiveness forces students into a discourse, but it may be a discourse that

ignores their subjectivity and their existence. Queer pedagogy, on the other hand, seeks to transform that discourse and place sexual literacy as central. William J. Spurlin, in the introduction to his edited collection *Lesbian and Gay Students and the Teaching of English*, says that Queer pedagogy can achieve critical goals by going beyond the idea of inclusion: "We [should] not see difference as a solution to a problem (e.g., by adding a more diverse representation of authors to a literary canon) but as an ongoing site of inquiry" (xvi). While sexuality is central in this pedagogy, it does not exclude other identity categories. In a piece called "The Queer Turn in Composition Studies: Reviewing and Assessing an Emerging Scholarship," Alexander, with co-author David Wallace, says Queer pedagogy "may be even more powerful when considered together with other important axes of identity, such as gender, race, class, physical and mental/emotional abledness, spirituality, and age" (W301).

In going beyond inclusion, queer pedagogy is based on the idea that the discourse of sexuality is important for students of marginalized and non-marginalized sexual identities. For Alexander, sexual literacy, though often ignored in the classroom, is a vital part of literacy for anyone who wants to engage in political discourse (2). Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the belief that interrogation of sexuality is only important to LGBTQQIA people "minoritizing." Instead, she says texts should be re-examined based on problematic cultural understandings of sexuality: "Any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition." According to Sedgwick, our analyses of discourse are flawed because we do not examine the ways our binary understanding of sexuality has caused us to organize thoughts into many similar binarisms.

Using Sedgwick's frame of reference, one could argue that one of these binarisms is the body/mind split. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks reminds us:

> Trained in the philosophical context of Western metaphysical dualism, many of us [professors] have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind. Believing this, individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body. To call attention to the body is to betray the legacy of repression and denial that has been handed down to us by our professorial elders, who have been usually white and male." (191)

Some queer pedagogues have argued that this legacy is also heteronormative, and treats sexual orientation and gender identity (unless straight and gender normative) as taboo, as if the existence of LGBTQQIA teachers crosses to the "body" side of the binary.

In some cases, queer pedagogy can be seen as a response to this binarism, as the academy has traditionally prioritized the mind over the body. The body has been erased in some pedagogy scholarship. In an article called "Written through the Body: Disruptions and 'Personal' Writing," William Banks says that in an attempt to move away from expressivism, many writing teachers have denounced the use of the personal narrative in favor of assignments they view as more critical. Banks says that while there are problematic versions of expressivism, "such a pedagogy reminds us of something important about teaching and learning: regardless of how distant we can get ourselves from the embodied experiences of our lives, if we do not find ways back to those bodies, those experiences, we run the risk of impoverishing our theories and pedagogies" (22). Banks suggests an embodied approach, "that is, sexualized, gendered" (22) to theory and pedagogy. He says:

> When I'm brave (?) enough to put the words on paper, my embodied writing [about sexuality] marks my [readers'] unacknowledged heterosexuality, refigures their terms family and love and parent and teacher, questions the nuclear family, creates new metaphors for teaching. They have to find a way to shift their definitions (and thus their epistemologies),or forgo them, or shut me out to maintain them. (29)

Banks is arguing here that writing that reflects the body is more potentially transformative than forms of critical writing that are removed from the body, despite critique from those who feel personal writing is "a solipsistic narcissism of knowledge production" (22). Banks responds to the charge that personal writing is not critical by saying, "I can think through my experiences both historically and ahistorically. Thus, I can use the 'personal' to make sense of the world, as well as the other way around" (23). That is, personal writing that challenges the binary between personal and critical and between the mind and the body challenges its readers.

This is not the only binary queer pedagogy challenges us to blur; it often calls on teachers to blur boundaries and identity categories in ways that complicate the ways we define writing, learning, and the classroom. In "Writing Inqueeries: Bodies, Queer Theory, And an Experimental Writing Class," Jennifer DiGrazia and Michael Boucher talk about the ways in which they attempted to queer their own writing class, a writing workshop on queer inquiry. This includes the effort to queer the act of writing and the boundaries between genres, as discussed above. They also talk about their goal to queer the expectation of authority that comes with the instructor role, though they talk about how this intention is complicated by the density and sometimes inaccessibility of queer theory texts. "in the beginning, class sometimes felt stiff, forced, as if we were spoon-feeding our students queer theory. It didn't feel queer. We thought a queer-centered classroom should involve some elements of fun as well as a structure that questions and resists the authority that comes with the role of instructor," they say (31). In a community setting, the expectations of power are flattened. There's not an instructor given institutional power, and the power structure in a writing group can be seen as queering the way we use writing to begin with. That does not, however, mean that the concept of queering power structures is irrelevant to a community group. For example, larger societal power structures, such

as those giving power to men over women or white people over people of color, as well as issues

of homonormativity, should be considered. Groups must be mindful of ways to avoid

marginalizing the goals and the voices of those who are marginalized within the marginalized

community. Queering elements of power should be a goal.

Alexander and Wallace argue that this kind of queering is the best approach for queer

pedagogy as an extension of its previous goals. They see queer pedagogy as occurring in three

waves—the first wave of writing involved confronting homophobia and the second with

fostering inclusivity, both dealing mostly with LGBTQQIA teachers and students in the

classroom. The most recent wave of scholarship, they say, looks at applying queer theory to the

composition classroom. They argue that unlike previous approaches, this one "attends directly to

the tension between the need to make queer people and issues more visible in our classrooms and

culture and the potential that doing so has to reinscribe the very problematic homo/hetero binary

it works to unseat" (311). They argue that if anything, increased visibility and more people who

are out based on previous decades of LGBTQQIA activism has raised the political stakes to work

on other issues caused by homophobia and discrimination. Queer pedagogy must work to "de-

stabilize static notions of what passes as normal, particularly as those norms cluster around

heterosexuality as the clearly privileged, desired mode of being" (312). This disruption of

heteronormativity can get lost in other goals. Other authors have argued about similar

progressions of queer pedagogical goals.

For example, Kumashiro says educators have attempted four approaches. These

approaches are categorized by the way they approach the concept of the Other. Kumashiro

explains, "I use the term Other to refer to those groups that are traditionally marginalized,

denigrated, or violated (i.e. Othered) in society." The four approaches to antioppressive

pedagogy as Kumashiro defines them are:

1. Education for the Other
2. Education about the Other
3. Education that is critical of privileging and Othering
4. Education that changes students and society (30)

This section focuses on the latter two types as they are more likely to be adapted for LGBTQQIA

community writing groups. Education critical of privileging and Othering calls for educators and

students to "examine not only how some groups are Othered in society, but also how some

groups are privileged, as well as how this dual process is legitimized and maintained by social

structures" (44). Part of this approach can involve writing about and discussing how students' (or

in the case of community groups, writers') identities correspond to intersections of privileged

and Othered categories. This approach must, Kumashiro says, "involve both the critique and

transformation of structural oppression" (46). As a tool for transformation, this approach may

use Freire's concept of *conscientizaçao*, a form of consciousness raising that involves

recognizing and taking action against oppression (46). A drawback of this approach according to

Kumashiro is that it does not necessarily address the complicated ways in which oppression

works differently for different people. While it acknowledges intersections, it doesn't address

contradictions in the ways people experience oppression. Kumashiro says that the final approach,

education that changes students and society, addresses this problem in that it takes a

poststructuralist approach. He argues that poststructuralist ideas can "help address some of the

weaknesses of the first three approaches to antioppressive education. These concepts include

ways in which identity is shifting, ways in which knowledge is partial, and ways in which

oppression is citationally produced" (53). Kumashiro views these concepts as responsive to the

complicated nature of identity, oppression, and experience.

Within composition pedagogy, Malinowitz grounds queer pedagogy in poststructuralist social epistemic and critical pedagogies, but with caveats. She understands the relationship of critical and social epistemic pedagogies differently than Kumashiro does. Specifically, she notes, James Berlin's social epistemic rhetoric is designed so that "students understand how social knowledge gets produced (and presume that with this understanding students will choose to position themselves in the world differently than they would have without it)," whereas critical pedagogy is more transformative. Malinowitz says, "[s]ocial-epistemic rhetoricians want to fashion their students as critical intellectuals," she says "[whereas] liberatory [critical] teachers want to bring their students to self-realization as actors in history and 'empower' them to change the conditions of their lives" (92). While it is true that Queer pedagogy often positions itself as grounded in critical pedagogy—Spurlin and Alexander both ground it there as well—Malinowitz also points out critical pedagogy's lack of attention to sexuality as a factor in oppression and its tendency to present "oppressor" and "oppressed" as an uncomplicated binary (98). She discusses other problems with Shor's approach. Shor writes about oppression that students may have internalized and about uncovering hegemonic perceptions students might have, and in doing so, Malinowitz points out, "he seems . . . to appropriate the 'oppressor's' privilege of devaluing and delegitimizing their interpretations of their own lives, based on the world view from his privileged subject position," (99). This concern is why writing group facilitators need to be mindful of privilege and limitations, for example by keeping in mind Paula Mathieu's critique of Flower's problem-solving and by making sure goals are determined by the group and not a single individual.

Malinowitz says that Henry Giroux's version of critical pedagogy is closest to what she envisions for a LGBTQQIA classroom. She says his pedagogy of resistance allows for more complexity of intersections of power. She quotes him as saying that in this pedagogical setting:

> Students come to grips with what a given society has made of them, how it has incorporated them ideologically and materially into its rules and logic, and what it is that they need to affirm and reject in their own histories in order to begin the process of struggling for the conditions that will give them opportunities to lead a self-managed existence. (Giroux qtd. in Malinowitz, 98)

Though I agree with Malinowitz that this approach is a "step in the right direction" in terms of addressing complexity, a transformative pedagogy might also have a larger impact than on just the students who are in the classroom, as an activist group might want to do. Returning to Mathieu's statement that writing in the community has broad stakes, I would also argue that it can have broad impact.

Later sections explore the specific recommendations some queer pedagoges make for achieving sexual literacy goals.

Queer Activism

The entire concept of queer activism cannot be covered here. For one thing, activists themselves will have more to tell me—people hold more knowledge on activism than texts do, so a review of the literature will be necessarily limited in scope. Further, the information from in this thesis that comes from interviews is not all-encompassing because as with any activist

group, queer activism is characterized by a multitude of perspectives, sometimes disagreeing with or complicating one another. For this reason, writing groups should brainstorm their own goals and perspectives. Strategies for doing so are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 1 discusses the existence of a multiplicity of perspectives on language. Another example of the varied perspectives of queer activists, one that has been paid a lot of attention by the mainstream media and by politicians, is marriage equality. Though it is not an important element of my argument, examining the various perspectives activists hold on marriage equality demonstrates that queer activism is not a monolith.

Marriage equality as a primary activist goal is perhaps problematic in and of itself. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, editor of *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* calls marriage one of the "holy trinity of [assimilation]," along with military service and adoption (1). Like a pedagogy that is inclusive rather than transformative, a focus on marriage can be viewed as an attempt towards integration into a fundamentally flawed, heterosexist power system, which is what Sycamore means by assimilation. Sycamore says assimilation "has become the central preoccupation of a gay movement centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power." For example, she calls out the organization Marriage Equality as elitist, talking about a celebrity-populated benefit they held in 2004, wondering what their activism would mean to people with less privilege. "Gay assimilationists . . . see no need to confront the legacies of systemic and systematic U.S. oppression that prevent most people living in this country from exercising their supposed 'rights,'" she says (1). Sycamore condemns marriage equality advocates for "brush[ing] aside generations of queer efforts . . . in favor of a 1950s model of white-picket-fence 'we're just like you' normalcy" and

says that if these advocates want actual progress, "they would fight for the abolition of marriage . . . and universal access to the services that marriage can sometimes help procure" (3).

The rhetoric Sycamore targets does exist. The marriage equality organization Freedom to Marry hosts a website called "Why Marriage Matters," a public outreach effort that features the stories of same-sex couples who explain why marriage is important to them. "We eat dinner together around a big table every night, just like a typical TV family from the 50's – which is not so typical these days," say Chris Williams and Juan McCoy, a couple featured on the site. Another couple, Tobi and Karen, describe themselves as "the gay Cleavers," and say, "If you look at any traditional American family, we're it – except our daughter has two moms. We both work; we love each other and our daughter" ("Stories"). More than just another perspective, this positioning is a rhetorical move for marriage equality activists. It appeals to those who subscribe to the anti-marriage-equality argument that marriage equality is in opposition to traditional family values. Statements like Williams and McCoy's and Tobi and Karen's challenge stereotypes that LGBTQQIA people are uninterested in long-term relationships and families. I do not point out the rhetorical positioning of these stories in order to invalidate them; marriage is important to these couples. In order to express it in a public forum, they must appeal to an audience of a larger heterosexist and homophobic society, and arguing for acceptance from such a society is what Sycamore and others critique as assimilationist.

However, there are activists who argue for marriage equality for a queer activist audience and on different grounds. For example, Matt Coles, director of the ACLU's LGBT and AIDS Project, wrote an article on marriage equality for *the Advocate*, a publication that covers LGBT news and issues. Coles argues that first, marriage is important to some LGBT people for personal reasons. "For some LGBT folks, only marriage will do because they take a pretty conventional

view of commitment and relationships. That should come as no surprise; we're everywhere and that includes ideology and view of the world as well as geography," he says. However, he says the reason he supports marriage equality because he believes it is one step towards challenging legal discrimination against LGBT people:

> Discrimination requires a rationale. The rationale for treating gay people differently has always been that we were not capable of the kind of love and commitment that straight people share. The fight over marriage puts the truth of that rationale squarely at issue. If the love we share and the commitments we make (which, as with straight people, vary widely) are not different, there is no rationale for excluding us from marriage. More critically, there is no rationale for excluding us from jobs, from parenting, even from the prom. A person's sexual orientation, as the Court said, will not be a legitimate reason to deny a person rights. (Coles)

Another important activist, Urvashi Vaid, shares similar perspectives to Sycamore on assimilation, but still argues that marriage equality matters. Vaid, who has written extensively on LGBT rights and who has held leadership positions with several national LGBT organizations, is concerned that the LGBT movement of the 1990s and 2000s has been less concerned with larger societal transformation and more concerned with assimilating. "The movement has turned into a cheerleading squad for LGBT sameness," she says in a transcription of a 2011 address she delivered at the Roosevelt Institute for Public Policy at Hunter College. In the same speech, she argues:

> If the LGBT movement ignored the broader dynamics of racism, economic exploitation, gender inequity, and cultural freedom . . . a partial, conditional simulacrum called equal rights, a state of virtual equality that would grant legal and formal equal rights to LGBT people, but that would not ultimately transform the institutions of society that repress, denigrate and immobilize sexual and gender minorities. (Vaid, "Still Ain't Satistfied")

That said, Vaid still supports marriage equality. When she was executive director of the Arcus Foundation, the organization supported the "Marriage Matters" ad campaign, which was mentioned in an editorial in the *Advocate*. In a letter to the *Advocate*'s editors, Vaid says, "["Marriage Matters" is] quite controversial in our community--we do not all agree. . . that

marriage is the primary issue on which our movement should concentrate. Yet I would maintain that both education campaigns ["Marriage Matters" and another project the editorial discussed] are valuable and contribute to LGBT freedom. They are . . . examples of just some of the work we might do in the months and years ahead" (Vaid, "Wagging the Dog"). Vaid's ideal marriage equality movement, however, would work towards more transformative ends than just marriage rights. In the Hunter College speech, Vaid said:

> [Ideally,] marriage activism would fight fiercely for full recognition of the freedom to marry, but it would also support the right to domestic partnership and civil unions for straight and gay people alike. It would not be silent on the question of the right for all unmarried people to have health insurance, or the freedom for each of us to not be disabled in our lives by the form of family in which we live. It could support a family policy agenda that recognizes and strengthens supports for parents (of all kinds), for people making choices to care for each other and support each other, instead of gay versions of the nuclear family alone. (Vaid, "Still Ain't Satisfied")

The variety of perspectives on marriage equality is one example of the multiplicity of goals, experiences, and perspectives within the LGBTQQIA community and among queer activists. This is, as Coles points out, partially due to the differences in lived experience and opinions that would be found among any group. This becomes more prominent with activism, because the catalysts for action, which can be personal, cultural, passionate, legal, emotional, liberal or radical, and complicated, are often different from one activist to the next and lead to different reactions and goals.

A number of activists have pointed out that their own perspectives do not necessarily represent an entire movement, and that makes queer activism challenging to define. Queer scholar Jan Wickman, a research fellow at Åbo Akademiin Finland, points out:

> Since its conception, one of the defining characteristics of queer as a critical scholarly and political perspective has been that it resists definition. On the one hand, this reluctance towards precision reflects the queer-theoretical position that clear-cut categorisations are problematic as such. On the other hand, it is a strategy to maintain the dynamism of the perspective. However, as the literature has grown wider and the concept

has been applied in ever new contexts, it has also acquired new, sometimes inconsistent,
meanings and connotations. (Wickman)

Wickman demonstrates that queer activists often have the same complicated relationship with queer theory and identity politics that queer scholars do. It is important to note that these groups are not mutually exclusive, but that the implications of this tension may play out differently in activist contexts than they do in academic ones. In his critique of queer theory and politics, Tim Edwards argues that the attention activists have paid to queer theory is impractical; queer theory, he says, strives for "a potentially utopian outcome rather than an analysis of the present . . . the reality for many people much of the time is that their sexualities remain remarkably constant and stable over time even when lived experiences may contradict this" (472). In this case, he points out a potential rift between scholarly activism, which may be more theoretical, and grassroots activism, which often arises from a direct need for material change.

Scholarly activism can be tied to liberal activism (as opposed to radical activism) in that it takes place within the established system of academia. The typical understanding of the distinction is that liberal activists seek equality within the extant power structures of society through methods such as contacting legislators to support measures towards equality, changing institutional policies to make them more inclusive, and contributing to the body of research on an issue of inequality. Radical activists see extant power structures as flawed and say that for substantial change to happen, they must be abolished. Radical activists tend to engage in more subversive techniques to move others towards action such as rallies and demonstrations, street art, and underground publishing. A good example of liberal and radical approaches would be the difference between the activists who fight for marriage equality—the equal right to enter into an extant institution—and those who call for the abolishment of marriage.

Though liberal vs. radical activism can be a useful way of analyzing activism, it is a false binary. Many activists engage in and identify with both types of activism to some extent. For example, those who call for the abolishment of marriage, such as Mattlilda Bernstein Sycamore, often add that rather than fighting for the right to marriage in order to obtain healthcare, for example, activists should fight for universal healthcare, something that would involve the liberal approach of working with in the existing government system. Many academic queer activists, and I would include myself, identify with the idea that extant power structures are flawed and should be abolished, but then continue to work within the system of academia, sometimes challenging or subverting its conventions.

Edwards, however, notes an issue with this. Academics who work within the academy but subscribe to queer theory, rooted in literary criticism of Sedgwick and Butler, create a problematic disconnect:

> As an analysis within the discipline of literary criticism per se [reliance on queer theory] seems perfectly appropriate; yet to propose that this [queer theory] then forms the mainstay of contemporary sexual politics or even, perhaps more appropriately, the foundation for a queer cultural critique is overstating [queer theory's] significance and fraught with difficulties, not least of all the extrapolation of social and political developments through an analysis of elite cultural texts (475)

Edwards' critique of liberal academic activism is not the only one; liberal activism as a whole has been charged this way. To assimilate into an existing system, liberal activists sometimes focus on the rights of those most accepted in the extant power structures. Sycamore says, "[a] gay elite has hijacked queer struggle and positioned their desires as everyone's needs . . . [e]ven when the gay rights agenda does include important issues, it does it in a way that consistently prioritizes the most privileged while fucking over everyone else" (2).

It is interesting to note that depending on who is writing about it, queer theory has been characterized as both liberal (created based on elite academic texts, not responding to the

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material needs of real activists) and radical (designed to dismantle the extant limiting identity categories and homonormative privileging of assimilating folks, or as Sycamore puts it, LGBT really means, "gay, with lesbian in parentheses, throw out the bisexuals, and put trans on for a little window-dressing" (2)). Both of these demonstrate that being an activist in an academic context is complicated and hard to categorize.

Edwards notes a rift between academic and activist goals, saying, "lesbian and gay studies, and the queer theory and politics attendant with it, is divorced from wider politics or connections with grassroots activism" (473). This divide that Edwards describes makes interviews with activists even more exigent; they help to address the limits of scholarly approaches to activism.

Chapter 3: Goals and Methodological Meditations

Goals of the Workshops

The work of Flower, Gere, and other Community Literacy scholars demonstrates that community writing groups may have a variety of desired outcomes. The intent of the workshop guidelines developed in Chapter 5 is to lay the groundwork for a LGBTQQIA writing group that uses creative and critical approaches towards activist ends. Though the specific goals will vary from group to group, this section focuses on several broad goals of queer activism, ranging from those that support more liberal activism to those that are more radical. The bases and drawbacks of the goals are described below. They include community building, increasing visibility, consciousness-raising as inquiry, and disruptions.

Community Building as an activist goal

Though community building may refer to a number of conceptions of community, it is used here to refer to building community within the activist writing group. To do so, this section draws upon the concept of creating a safe space with attention to the benefits and limitations of the literature on safe spaces.

The concept of "safe space" has been used to describe strategies for creating a classroom where students can share without fear of discrimination and later to a movement in universities to mark spaces as safe for LGBTQQIA people. These drawbacks include the argument that safe space is not meaningful beyond a surface level and that safe space discourse is minoritizing. With attention to these problems, which are explored below, the concept of a safe space may still

be useful for a LGBTQQIA community group if the safe space is created reflexively and with care.

Some have argued that safe space discourse is counterproductive because it fails to address heteronormative society and can limit productive conflict surrounding heterosexism. Conflict is limited because in a classroom, "safe space" is sometimes executed as "conflict-free space." In their article on the effectiveness of "safe classrooms" as perceived by students, Lynn C. Holley and Sue Steiner note that "A classroom in which safe means no conflict, and that no one is ever feeling challenged or uncomfortable is likely to be a classroom in which little learning and growth are occurring" (52). In a community setting, this may mean that disagreements that could lead to clearer and further-reaching articulation of activist goals may be avoided in the interest of avoiding conflict, which limits collective action and community building.

Some of the criticisms that safe space discourse does not disrupt heteronormative power structures fall in line with broader criticisms of liberal activism as a force for assimilation into a fundamentally flawed system. In their analysis of safe space discourse in high school Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), Maralee Mayberry, Tiffany Chenneville, and Sean Currie argue that "the safe-space discourse, built on the assumption that LGBT youth and their allies need to be protected from a sometimes hostile school environment, sidesteps the heteronormative school climate that makes necessary the existence of GSAs in the first place" (57). They are arguing here that a safe space is limited in a larger culture that is hostile to people with non-normative gender and sexual orientations. In her discussion of college English departments' use of "Safe Space" stickers on office doors to denote that they are allies, Catherine Fox says, "what seems most important in creating more conducive conditions for queer faculty and students at

universities and colleges is not 'inclusion' in existing frameworks, but a radical interrogation of the performance and normalization of white heteronormativity" (502). Applied to broader activism, this would support the idea that a radical approach wherein the existing system is examined is necessary. Without this focus on heterosexism, safe space discourse places LGBTQQIA people in the problematized role, casting the problem as that of a population that needs to be protected rather than that of a heterosexist culture that must be transformed.

This is a minoritizing view, one that pathologizes LGBTQQIA people. Currie, Mayberry, and Chenneville say that within the context of high schools, "we need to think carefully about the way in which we unintentionally frame sexual-minority youth as the problem (e.g., in need of safe spaces), rather than considering that it is the heteronormative culture of schools that needs to be tackled" (58). In the case of an LGBTQQIA writing group, this kind of safe space discourse would imply that cultures need not allow LGBTQQIA writing to disrupt heteronormative assumptions, just make LGBTQQIA people feel comfortable telling their stories in protected spaces. Fox argues that this focus on protection and comfort "tends to define LGBT people singularly through oppression," which is dehumanizing. She quotes Alexander and Banks, who say, "[t]o discuss or appropriate LGBT people, lives, texts, and issues as *only* oppressed is to do harm; these lives and texts are more complicated than that" (qtd. in Fox 502). This framing of LGBTQQIA folks as others needing protection creates a binary that places straight allies in a problematic space as well.

Safe space discourse, particularly when applied to the practice of straight faculty putting "safe space" stickers on their office doors, places straight allies in a position of agency and places LGBTQQIA folks as the object of that agency. Safe space stickers, especially when no training is required before one can display them and "there is . . . some question about whether or

not [the faculty member] is prepared to advocate for the necessarily complex population denoted by 'LGBT,'" give allies the sense that they can *grant* LGBTQQIA folks a space, as if LGBTQQIA folks are not entitled to be safe in all spaces (Fox 498). Fox argues that the stickers serve allies more than they serve queer folks because they allow straight allies who display them to be free from feeling social responsibility towards heterosexism. They can engage in a similar position to Alcoff's "retreat," not engaging in issues of heterosexism because as allies who create safe spaces, they do not view themselves as part of the problem. Fox's concern with this approach to safe space is that it "ultimately protects the social safety (or comfort) of allies, thereby occluding genuine reflection, dialogue, and struggle about what might constitute safety for marginalized peoples" (503).

Though Fox is talking specifically about the use of safe space stickers, her criticisms can apply to any shallow gesture of solidarity or unreflexive reference to safe space. In a writing group, this could play out in a number of ways. Complex intersections of identity, power and marginalization, heteronormativity and homonormativity (where GLB people and people who present as gender normative are more accepted by heterosexist society than transgender people, genderqueer people, intersex people, and other sexual minorities, and thus become the primary benefactors of the queer activist movement) are always at play in a group of activists, and those factors may at times play into the binary of the agent who provides safe space and the object who is protected by that safe space. This binary reinscribes power differences and closes dialogue about different experiences. If writing groups engage in a shallow statement of "safe space" for all in the group but never revisit it or interrogate its meaning, it may give some members of the group the sense of social comfort and complacency that Fox says straight allies might fall into

with safe space stickers. Instead, LGBTQQIA writing groups should use diversity of experience and perspectives to constantly evaluate, expand, and re-write their activist goals.

With those important criticisms in mind, a number of factors including cultural heteronormativity, negative school experiences, the sometimes personal elements of activism, and the need for a space to discuss anger, do necessitate writing group community building through the creation of a safe space, which Holley and Steiner call a space of "protection from psychological or emotional harm" (50). For the purposes of a writing group, this is defined as a space where all members of the group maintain agency over the purpose of the texts they produce; are given space to share goals, experiences, opinions, and feelings confidentially and with assurance that their ideas will not be dismissed, even if they are discussed; and confidentiality. This may vary based on the needs of each group.

Chapter 5 outlines activities and writing prompts that groups can use towards establishing this space. These should not be used to close the conversation on safe space ("now that we've created safe space guidelines, we no longer need to address issues of power difference in our group") but to open it. Fox urges, "we must engage safety as a process through which we establish dialogues that create and re-create the conditions in which queer folks are more free from the physical and psychic violence of those normalizing processes through which we all move and operate" (506). Groups should reflect on the meaning of safe space often, discussing and re-writing as often as needed.

Visibility as an activist goal

In the context of queer composition pedagogy, the concept of visibility was often talked about in the 1980s and 90s through discussions about teachers being out in the classroom.

According to Karen Kopelson, some felt that an out teacher can be a role model for gay students and "a visible representative of an identity that might otherwise remain an abstraction" (20). When applied to queer activism as a whole, out LGBTQQIA people in schools, communities, workplaces, politics, and the media can have similar effects.

One example of an activist project towards visibility is National Coming Out Day. According to the Human Rights Campaign, National Coming Out Day grew from the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and strives "to promote a safe world for LGBT individuals to live truthfully and openly" ("The History of Coming Out"). Coming Out Day encourages LGBT people and their allies to come out towards some of the ends mentioned by Kopelson above—increasing visibility and role models and attaching stigmatized abstract identities to real people. It is possible to see how activists like Sycamore might critique Coming Out Day, which provides potential activists with ideas for Coming Out Day parties and events and has often had celebrity spokespeople (recalling Sycamore's critique that assimilationist activism is often elitist and celebrity-driven), and while it encourages people to come out, it does not necessarily challenge the problematic structures that "closet" people through assumed heterosexuality.

In the classroom context, Alexander and Wallace describe the conflict surrounding visibility as a goal as "the tension between the need to make queer people and issues more visible in our classrooms and culture and the potential that doing so has to reinscribe the very problematic homo/hetero binary it works to unseat" (73). Similarly, Kopelson points out that presenting "coming out" as a solution places the burden for eradicating homophobia on sexual minority teachers (or, in the case of broader activism, on LGBTQQIA people) rather than everyone who needs to challenge their understanding of heteronormativity, similar to criticisms

of safe space discourse as minoritizing (20). In terms of the larger framework of activism, visibility is limited in that it works towards inclusion rather than larger change.

Another argument against visibility as a primary goal is that it is outdated and no longer has enough potential for transformation in our current cultural context. As we have moved towards visibility, other forms of activism have not kept up, raising the stakes for LGBTQQIA folks who come out. Alexander and Wallace argue that in the past few decades, "nonnormative sexual identities have become more visible in American culture, as witnessed by such primetime television shows as *Will and Grace* and such acclaimed Hollywood movies as *Boys Don't Cry* and *Brokeback Mountain*," but they point out that:

> This increased visibility has not, however, translated into an automatic acceptance of LBGT people and experiences in American society or composition classrooms. Indeed, the increased attention has, in some sense, raised the stakes over such polarizing political issues as gay marriage and adoption. (70)

As people with non-normative identities have become more visible in the media and encouraged to come out through efforts like Coming Out Day, more people come out into a system that is still heterosexist and lacks safety and support for LGBTQQIA people. Further, it may make safety an even more urgent concern. Malinowitz argues that the increase of visibility in the 1990s led to a cultural backlash in which more antigay violence occurred. She says, "[c]ontrary to the simple optimistic belief that 'things are changing now' in some linear, unidirectional way—i.e., that increased visibility for lesbians and gay men is ushering in a new era of acceptance— political gains have been accompanied by a dramatic rise in antilesbian and antigay violence," she says (112). If we work towards visibility as a goal, thereby encouraging more people to come out, we must continually fight the violent cultural backlashes that make coming out unsafe.

In making arguments about visibility, it is important to note that *increased* visibility does not mean that the activist goal of visibility has been achieved, or that it is not worth working

towards. Much of the media visibility of LGBT people is within limited heterosexist frameworks and LGBT people are visible in limited ways. LGBT people of color, non-normative gender presentation, with disabilities, and of working class are not visible in the media. Likewise, sexual and gender minorities such as genderqueer and intersex people are often not visible in the media. Further, when LGBT people are portrayed in the media, they are often portrayed in stereotypical ways or only as white, middle-class, and able-bodied. For these reasons, visibility is still an important activist goal as long as we consider the fact that visibility alone is not enough to disrupt heteronormativity. Alexander and Wallace point out that though more transformative tactics are needed as well, liberal methods like working towards visibility "retain relevance for composition theory and pedagogy as long as nonnormative sexual identities remain problematic in our culture," and I argue that they retain relevance for activists outside the academy as well.

It is worth noting that many of the life writing prompts and public projects in Chapter 5 can be used towards a goal of community visibility, if that is a goal of the group. It is important to balance this with the confidentiality determined by the safe space; everyone should retain agency over their own story and be sure that narratives are not co-opted in the sense that Berlin warns against in his discussion of expressivist personal writing.

Consciousness-Raising as Inquiry as an activist goal

One way a group of activists can draw upon each other's situated knowledge is through discussion, possibly facilitated by writing, of how forms of discrimination may be linked, how they may lead to specific activist goals, and how activists can work towards those goals. The review of the literature discusses the work of Linda Flower on the tactic she calls intercultural

inquiry, which she views as a way to elicit the situated knowledge of stakeholders through narrative to work towards meaningful change. In an article co-written with Lorraine Higgins and Elanore Long, she says, "narrative . . . [can turn] individual knowledge into a communal resource . . . Narrative also has a persuasive power that can help audience identify with the teller's perspective in a way that abstract and generalized positions or claims do not" (21).

Flower talks about intercultural inquiry as occurring in a contact zone. Many of the projects she describes in both her 2008 book *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* and the co-written article with Higgins and Long, involve gathering the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in community problems with the goal of constructing "a way for people to acknowledge each other's multiple forms of expertise through talk and text and to draw on their differences as a resource for addressing shared problems" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 9). They talk specifically about the role of college mentors who facilitate this process as:

> [M]entors who . . . contribute not by defining the problem for others or offering prepackaged responses, but by helping groups articulate, document, and update their sense of the rhetorical situation as it unfolds and develops. Moreover, they prompt stakeholder groups to reflect on the partiality of their own perspectives on the inclusiveness of the collaborative project. (Higgins, Long, and Flower 12)

In other words, the student mentor with institutional power acts as a sort of mediator to synthesize group perspectives. This relates again to Mathieu's criticism of intercultural inquiry, discussed in the review of the literature. Though the goal of intercultural inquiry is to engage in "dialogue across difference," (Flower 9) it is problematic to place the institutional figure ("college mentor") in the role of problem-solving facilitator because it compromises the agency of the community members.

In a community writing group setting, however, with shared governance and flattened hierarchical structures, groups can draw on the potential of intercultural inquiry to pool resources

and perspectives—for, as Higgins, Long, and Flower point out, "all stakeholders have knowledge, cultural capital, material resources, and experience that can be critical" (12)--without some of the issues Mathieu describes. Though there may be members of a community writing group with forms of institutional power, in a community group writing setting, that power should not translate to stepping into the mentor role Flower describes. That said, groups should consider how intersections of power and privilege may impact their approach to intercultural inquiry, both as a positive force (allowing the group to develop inquiries that draw on the perspectives of diverse stakeholders) and negatively (creating a power imbalance where the literacy skills of some group members are valued over those of others).

In a community setting, that means group members could draw on narrative and discussion to describe community problems. Other members of the group could draw on their own activist experience and perceptions of the problem being described to ask questions. Higgins, Long and Flower recommend what-if questions that "raise possibilities for both personal and structural change (27), such as "What if teenagers who are bullied for gender expression had a chance to rewrite school policies on bullying?" They also recommend questions that are "prompts for elaboration" that "prompt explicitly for the story-behind-the-story, a strategy that plumbs for the writer's deeper level of interpretation" (22). Examples of prompts for elaboration include "what would a teenager [or identity group member] see going on here that adults [or group outsiders] wouldn't? Why did she do that? Why did he say that?" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 22). Finally, they recommend that questions that address rival perspectives, allowing the original narrative to address those perspectives (23). They envision a space where those rival perspectives are present, which may or may not be the case in an activist community writing group. Group members may imagine alternate perspectives to discuss. Flower

recommends including at least three rival perspectives for a multivoiced inquiry (231). Ideally, this process of discussion "shape[s] the parameters of each project—the often shifting sense of the problem the group addresses, its rhetorical goals, the potential audiences they call upon to listen and act, and the outcomes they produce" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 12). In an activist writing group, this process may look something like the activist practice of consciousness-raising.

In her critical memoir *Tales of the Lavender Menace*[5], Karla Jay talks about her experiences with consciousness-raising (C-R) in the feminist and LGBT communities, including strengths and pitfalls. Her first experience with C-R was through Redstockings, a radical feminist group, who described their practice of C-R as an adaptation of the methods of Marxist revolutionaries in South American and of the Communist Chinese strategy of "speaking bitterness," used to organize peasants. Jay describes the Redstockings' approach this way:

> Once we had chosen a topic, we were to start with anyone who wanted to speak first as long as we avoided always beginning with the same person. Each woman was to speak on the topic and to narrate her personal experiences. The listeners were allowed to ask questions to clarify each account, but we were not to challenge the truthfulness of any statement, nor were we to psychoanalyze a woman or her motivations . . . After each woman had spoken, we were then to seek the common core of our oppression as women . . . [the aim] was to get the experience of as many people as possible in the common pool of knowledge. (51)

Throughout her memoir, Jay uses personal experiences and anecdotes to talk about the ways in which C-R, which she participated in as a member of the Redstockings and later as a member of the Gay Liberation Front and related breakoff groups, was successful for her and ways in which it seemed to fail whole groups of participants.

Jay says feminist C-R did help her "sense [her] commonality with other women" (53) and she says, "[d]uring those sessions my life and my attitudes changed, totally and irrevocably. Like

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[5] "Lavender menace" refers to Betty Friedan's 1969 comment that lesbian women posed a threat to feminism if it were to be taken seriously in the mainstream cultural sphere, wherein she used that name for lesbian causes.

a sculptor carving marble, each discussion reshaped my mind in small but indelible ways" (55). As evidence of this, Jay talks about C-R influencing her to change her surname from her father's to a part of her middle name. She says of the name change, "it felt immediately like a more accurate representation of who I was" (55). She says that each member of her C-R group experienced important epiphanies like hers.

Jay also tells stories that support her criticisms of C-R, which are numerous. One is that C-R groups were unequipped with the resources to address pain and trauma raised during group discussions and were unwilling to do so, believing that it served political ends. This criticism, along with other perspectives on narrative-as-healing, are discussed in more depth below.

She also criticizes how the lack of diversity in her C-R groups limited the groups' perspectives and made it impossible to speak for all women. She says the fact that all of the members of her groups were white and middle class made it easy for them to relate to one another (53). Jay says they failed to recognize how their privilege limited their understanding of women's experience and women's oppression. She says, "[w]e never talked about how much better off we were than poor women or women of color. We never discussed the fact that we, too, profited from the inequalities of the world" (54). The women in this C-R group did not recognize the limitations of their own positions. Alcoff notes, "where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location," or speak from a limited location on the experience of a whole group (7). In an attempt to validate the legitimacy of this speech, Jay demonstrates that the C-R groups tried to limit perspectives that challenged their concept of monolithic oppression of women.

Jay relates the story of an experience at a Redstockings C-R group where an older woman shares that she has enjoyed raising her children. The group leader, uncomfortable with any

suggestion that motherhood might be anything but oppressive, interrupts the woman and tells her to stop "resisting" C-R and "editing her narrative" (52). She talks about members of the group resisting discussions of class or that ask them to face their own privilege, and about how their discussions of their experiences with men made Jay uncomfortable coming out and led her to seek out gay and lesbian C-R groups. She says, "Both [feminist and gay and lesbian C-R groups] saw themselves as broad 'umbrella' groups that spoke for an entire 'class' of people—that is, women or homosexuals . . . But they failed to consider the internal divisions and tensions that ran counter to these class identities" (252). This is in line with poststructuralist feminist critiques of cultural feminism, which tends to define women essentially. In "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Linda Alcoff describes both approaches (cultural and post-structural) as responses to men's historic definitions of women. Cultural feminsts re-define women, "[construing] woman's passivity as her peacefulness, her sentimentality as her proclivity to nurture, her subjectiveness as her advanced self-awareness, and so forth," not rejecting the concept of women as definable but rejecting historic definitions. Post-structural feminists, on the other hand, "go about the business of deconstructing all concepts of woman and argue that both feminist and misogynist attempts to define woman are politically reactionary and ontologically mistaken" (Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism" 407). The cultural approach, which C-R takes, ignores, for example, how sexuality might alter experience. Relating this to the use of safe space stickers to indicate that LGBTQQIA people are welcome, Catherine Fox says:

> Despite their recognition of intersectionality, suggesting that other "isms" are the work of other groups implies a universal gay experience in relation to homophobia and heterosexism. Such a move fails to recognize . . . that queers who are marked "other" by race and gender experience such oppressions differently. (498)

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One weakness of C-R, then, is that it attempts to force the experience of oppression of everyone into the group into a single narrative.

Ideally, a writing group could adapt some of the practices of C-R without the implication that they are looking for a common core of oppression. A version of C-R that integrates some of the positions of intercultural inquiry helps to mitigate some of the limitations of both. The flattened power structures of C-R address the agency critique of intercultural inquiry and the focus on dialogue across difference may address C-R's tendency to erase difference. While neither C-R or intercultural inquiry can completely address one another's limitations, an approach that uses techniques of both might be one activist method towards describing problems and developing tactics for addressing them.

Disruptions as an activist goal

Though Chapter 2 discusses the tensions that sometimes exist between queer community activism and academic queer theory, there are many activists, particularly radical ones, who share queer theorists' goals to interrogate and restructure the ways in which we understand sexuality—these activists would argue, as well as many queer theorists, that the structures of sexual orientation are built on flawed foundations of heteronormativity and false binarisms. They might argue that unless those binaries are interrogated, sexual and gender minorities will be assimilated into a system that "includes" or "tolerates" difference, but still only understands it through a heteronormative lens.

Queer theory often works towards this goal through a poststructuralist lens. Chapter 1 talked about how queer theory asks us to complicate oversimplified and constructed cultural understandings of sexuality and gender. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, talks about

interrogating the binaries, sexual and otherwise, that organize western thought. She argues that

the binary of the "homo/heterosexual definition" shapes other cultural binaries—such as

public/private, knowledge/ignorance, and natural/unnatural—and that "many of the major nodes

of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century[6] Western culture as a whole are structured—

indeed, fractured," by the pervasive nature of this binary thinking (1). Because of the extensive

impact of these binaries, queer theory asks us to reconsider the things our culture teaches us to

take for granted, including categories of sexuality. Sedgwick demonstrates that the labels

(homosexual/heterosexual) associated with sexual orientation are overdue for questioning,

saying:

> It is a rather amazing fact that, of the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc.etc. etc.), precisely one, the gender of object choice, emerged from the turn of the century, and has remained, as *the* dimension denoted by the now ubiquitous category of "sexual orientation." (8).

As noted in Chapter 1, Harriet Malinowitz reminds us that however constructed the categories of

sexual orientation may be, their impact is still felt as discrimination and violence, thus cannot be

eliminated until we have developed meaningful ways to talk about these issues without them.

However, critics of this stance have talked about the unique ability of queer theory to disrupt

these issues. Karen Kopelson says, "[w]hen gender and sexuality are understood as expressions

of repeated expressions, rather than as expressions of an authentic self, conveniently bounded

identity categories tend to dissolve and a productive confusion takes their place" (20). This

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[6] In her preface to the 2008 edition of *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick talks about how the 1990 work translates in the 21st century. She says, "Among the questions asked by [the book] is how we . . . can wrap our minds properly around the mix of immemorial, seemingly fixed discourses of sexuality and, at the same time, around discourses that may be much more . . . ephemeral . . . . So it shouldn't be surprising that, as current as [the book] may feel in many respects, it bears the mark of its origin in a different decade—not to mention a different century and millennium"

productive confusion can be prompted with writing. When we produce queer writing, as Banks says about embodied writing, our readers must "find a way to shift their definitions (and thus their epistemologies), or forgo them, or shut [queer writers] out to maintain them," (29) thus leading to wider change.

Queer theory has offered a number of ways to disrupt fixed notions of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler, for example, asks us to consider how identities are constituted through acts, behaviors, and performance, challenging the idea that gender and sexuality are consistent categories. In response to constructed and binary understandings of sex and gender, Butler asks us to engage in gender trouble, or "parodic proliferation and subversive play of gendered meanings" (46). She encourages:

> An effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity. (46)

Queer pedagogues and activists have responded to this call to engage in gender trouble in a variety of ways. Banks, Malinowitz, and DiGrazia and Boucher have enacted pedagogies to queer writing and queer the classroom. In his 2012 presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, teacher Mark McBeth talked about asking his students, "how are you queer?" and talks about their momentary struggle to understand "queer" as not just relating to sexuality. This dissonance prompts students to call into question their assumptions and self-labels.

Activists, too, have sought to engage in queer disruptions and gender trouble. Some of the radical criticisms of liberal LGBTQQIA activism are based on the idea that fighting for equality in a broken system does not disrupt heteronormativity or change things for the better for

LGBTQQIA people. In an interview for *GA Voice*, an LGBT news outlet in Georgia, "queerlicious dyke tyke" Jesse Morgan criticizes the mainstream LGBT movement's focus on Don't Ask Don't Tell. He says the queer activist movement has drifted away from radical action. Morgan says, "Gay activism used to be against war, anti-criminalization, deconstructing the family institution, radical, radical, radical. Gay mainstream is enforcing activism that ascribes to a hetero lifestyle, partner, two kids, dog, and a white picket fence. We don't want that! No assimilation, yes to liberation!" (qtd. in Bagby). Along the same lines, Sycamore, whose work has been critical of some of the same efforts, talks about how binaries are at play within discussions of marriage equality. She says it is framed as a two-sided debate between "Christian fundamentalists" and LGBT folks and their allies, and that "queers who oppose marriage are shut out of the picture" (5). Sycamore says "the radical potential of queer identity lies in remaining outside—in challenging and seeking to dismantle the sickening culture that surrounds us" (6). She demonstrates that when issues are framed as binaries, it limits the possibilities we imagine, and that troubling binaries opens our imagination to new understandings of how sexuality might function in Western culture.

Gender trouble entails questioning the ideas we hold about sexuality and gender and challenging notions that are often deeply engrained. Writing, and particularly writing in "queered genres" that might have strong visual impact (see DiGrazia and Boucher) can be an effective tool to prompt readers to challenge their own assumptions about sexuality and gender. This takes on broad activist potential when taken outward into the community as a public project. One example of the use of personal narrative as part of an activist public project is columnist Dan Savage's It Gets Better[7] project. The writing exercises that follow incorporate the goal of disruption,

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[7] It Gets Better is a project founded by columnist Dan Savage in response to the spate of suicides by gay teenagers that drew media attention in 2010. The idea was "to show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential,

drawing from the tactics of queer pedagogues and queer activists, and groups can adapt these exercises for activism within the group, to allow each member to think through the binaries they may subscribe to, or for public projects that prompt other community members who become the audience to do the same.

On Therapeutic Writing as an activist goal

Because of similar structures between activist writing groups and C-R groups, it is useful to examine the role of therapy in C-R and the problems C-R groups faced in managing trauma. According to Karla Jay, the Redstockings were explicit in their insistence that C-R is not therapy. She explains, "The idea was not to be 'nice' or provide 'therapy' or to 'change women.' The whole point was to develop knowledge to overthrow male supremacy" (51). Jay talks about issues with this stance, which are discussed in more depth below, but in some sense, activist writing groups are likely to start from the same stance. If therapist writing were the goal of the group, the group would not likely focus on the cultural or systemic causes of these issues that could spark activism. Therapeutic writing falls under some of the same criticisms as expressivism; it is focused on the individual and on emotion, and it encourages looking inward rather than outward. Rather than release anger through catharsis, an activist group might seek to harness and focus anger in productive ways.

Further, viewing community writing purely as therapy contributes to a pathologizing stance that LGBTQQIA people are the problem and need to be fixed rather than viewing heterosexist culture as the problem that needs to be fixed. Based on this similarity of stance,

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and positivity their lives will reach—if they can just get through their teen years" ("What is the It Gets Better Project?"). The project is a series of videos created by LGBT adults (and later, by politicians, companies, and others, ostensibly as allies) talking about their experiences of bullying and discrimination in high school and their later successes. Though the project has been criticized for its limitations, which I will discuss in chapter 5, it has also grown quite large and reached a wide audience. The number of videos speaks to the impact of the project.

criticisms of the non-therapeutic approach of C-R groups can apply to activist writing groups as well.

Despite the stance that activist narrative and therapeutic narrative have different goals, psychologists and community literacy scholars have noted that personal writing can be therapeutic. Psychotherapist Linda Joy Meyers, author of *The Power of Memoir: How to Write Your Healing Story*, aims to help readers "create a memoir that helps you put unresolved conflicts behind you, heals past wounds, and helps you find meaning, value, and inspiration for your life" (xv), and shares her own experience of writing a healing memoir about her relationship with her mother. Jenny Horsman, after an extensive study on the role of trauma in community literacy programs, finds that the divide between community writing and therapy is often too harshly enforced. In her article "But I'm Not a Therapist: Furthering Discussion about Literacy Work with Survivors of Trauma," she argues that community literacy, when structured around "fully holistic program that incorporates mind, body, spirit and emotions," often inherently shares goals with therapy (32) and that literacy workers should work towards creating a bridge between the two.

As Jay points out, however, therapists or not, community members are not necessarily equipped to handle trauma without causing harm. She reflects on her experience in a lesbian C-R group where two members were therapists. "With their psychoanalytic backgrounds," she says, "they transformed C-R into group therapy sessions focused on helping individuals with their problems rather than on understanding the underlying class oppression we all suffered as gay women" (255). In addition to undermining the political efficacy of C-R, this led to a great deal of personal conflict in the group, and Jay was left feeling that "both of the therapists . . . each in her own way . . . had used the group" and that "in order to transform the world, we each had to learn

to mediate our own problems first" (259). Even when they approach writing itself as a form of therapy, community writers who are inclined to conduct group therapy may do so incorrectly. Louise DeSalvo, author of *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling our Stories Transforms our Lives*, points out that there is evidence that approaching writing therapy incorrectly can be psychologically damaging. She cites the work of Andrew Brink. "Brink believes that writing alone won't help us heal," she says. "For creative work to be genuinely reparative and transformational, Brink says, 'contemplation, discipline, and ritual' seem necessary" (100). Community writers may not be prepared to lead each other through this process, and thus community writing groups should not be presented as therapy.

That said, as DeSalvo points out, "writing about traumatic or troubling life experiences," something likely to come up in writing groups, "unleashes difficult, conflicting emotions" (93), and regardless of whether groups who share narratives present themselves as therapy, this is likely to come up. Jay recalls this as a problem in Redstockings C-R groups where they had a strict anti-therapist stance. She says:

> Each topic would elicit painful memories and experiences for at least one of us. It must have been excruciating for some members of my C-R group to discuss date rape, childhood abuse, parental incest, and a host of other iniquities that had been perpetrated on them. Even more horrifying was to lay those issues out for a group that would use them as a part of a larger political agenda but that lacked the analytical tools to grapple with the effects of that pain on a particular woman. Expressions of support did not subsititute for the kind of professional intervention some of the group members needed. The fact that any atrocity was considered part of a larger global pattern of abuse was often of little consolation to the woman who had bared her soul. . . collective political analysis seemed a distant, difficult, or downright irrelevant way to approach their suffering. (62)

To avoid the kinds of pitfalls Jay's C-R groups fell into, Horsman recommends that community writing groups build relationships with therapists and counselors for referrals in case someone needs a resource for working through trauma. These recommendations are addressed more

specifically in Chapter 5. Another problem with the scenario Jay describes is that the narratives of the women who shared trauma were co-opted for political purposes. Members of activist writing groups should always respect one another's agency in regards to how narratives can and should be used. With all of these perspectives in mind, it is clear that community writing and therapy share a complicated relationship that groups must negotiate.

Methodological Meditations on Interviewing

This thesis features interviews with two local activists. Though the interviews are not the centerpiece of the work, the perspectives of the two activists complicate textually-based understandings of activism and challenge efforts to categorize activists using labels like liberal and radical.

Because so much activism occurs as grassroots work within the community, secondary texts do not hold dynamic, complete information about activism in the way that activists themselves do. The discussion of activism would be incomplete without the expertise, voices and history of activists themselves. The two activists talk about their goals and methods of working towards these goals, and they talk about what conflicts activists navigate within their communities. The two activists outline their impressions of material conditions of LGBTQQIA centers and people, and their participation and methods of activism within the local community, as well as offer broader principles of successful activism so that the guidelines in Chapter 5 can address them.

The thesis includes interviews with LGBTQQIA activists because it seems fitting that their voices would be featured in an activist project. In their chapter on feminist interviewing in Hesse-Biber's *Handbook of Feminist Research*, DeVault and Gross talk about the value of

interviewing as a feminist research tool. They say, "The traditions of research interviewing have been strongly linked to social justice concerns and projects and the idea of bringing forward neglected voices" (176). These voices allow the thesis to discuss in detail the rhetorical situations and decisions of these activists.

Because this study is more exploratory than empirical, I stress subjectivity over validity and reliability, which is why the thesis features in-depth interviews with fewer activists. The goal in interviewing activists was to collect a depth of qualitative information rather than a breadth. It should be noted that the perspectives of these two activists do not represent everyone's activist goals or lived experience; a monolithic perspective does not exist. Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt point out that sexual subject positions are complicated by "race, ethnicity, postcoloniality, culture, class, and life-context" (97). Others have talked about how marginalized identities within the queer community have created further varied subject positions. Kath Browne says, "increasingly queer [theory] has critically explored homonormativity, which is the sexualisation and hierarchisation of particular forms of homosexuality within particular sexualized, classed, gendered and ethnic norms" (886). Societal homonormativity may cause some individuals to experience queerness differently from others.

Based on this, the thesis does not prescribe procedures for all LGBTQQIA groups, which would fall into the critique Ellen Cushman has for "missionary activism":"intervention without invitation [which] slips into paternalistic imposition," (qtd in Powell and Takyoshi). Instead, I hope to open dialogue about the ways in which LGBTQQIA writing groups could be implemented or useful in varied situations.

Queer methodology embraces these varied subjectivities. In her chapter in edited collection *Queer Methods and Methodologies,* Catherine J. Nash notes, "While there is no

quintessential queer perspective, queer analytical approaches . . . are largely grounded in poststructuralist . . . ideas that dispute traditional appeals to ontological coherency, universal truth, and causal connectedness that underlie modernist thought" (Nash 131).

For the interviews, this thesis uses an approach that combines feminist methodology and queer methodology for qualitative research. These methodologies lend themselves to projects with activist goals. DeVault and Gross say feminist research is "an activity that crosses the (blurred) boundaries between academic and other activist sites" (175). However, they caution researchers not to "co-opt activist ideas, 'taming' them for wider consumption." Considerations like these are not uncommon to feminist and queer methodologies. These somewhat overlapping methodologies advocate careful reflection on ethical issues such as positionality, researcher/participant relationships, and reciprocity. Additionally, they ask the researcher to consider the political and social impact of their work. Both challenge traditional field research methods "constituted through relations of power that define participants and researchers in hierarchical ways that are neither stable nor necessarily coherent" (Nash 134) and they complicate modernist understandings of empirical research as a tool for finding universal truth.

Feminist Methodology

Feminist methodology provides a challenge to what Kim V. L. England calls, "the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research – impartiality and objectivist neutrality – which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data" (243). She calls attention to the ethical problem surrounding this perspective, saying "those who are researched should be treated like people and not as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of 'facts'" (243).

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One solution to this problem that feminist researchers present is reciprocity. Katrina M. Powell and Pamela Takayoshi argue that researchers should constantly negotiate and re-evaluate the relationship they have with their participants so that the participants will be benefitted by the research in ways that they desire. Powell and Takayoshi argue, "[b]uilding reciprocal relationships with participants in research studies requires an attentiveness to relationship building—an attentiveness to the personalities, desires, needs, and knowledge of the people involved; an attentiveness to the give-and-take of human interaction; an attentiveness to participants as human beings," (Powell and Takayoshi, 395-396). This involves an attention to communication and mutual agenda-setting for activist roles.

Ellen Cushman explains that careful attention to reciprocity can help activist researchers avoid the problem of missionary activism. This stance reinscribes the hierarchical relationship between researcher and "researched." Missionary activism is of particular concern for privileged researchers who may fall into the error of speaking for marginalized others. Powell and Takayoshi present reciprocity as one way to address this problem. "[The] nonhierarchical, reciprocal relationship, in which both researcher and researched learn from one another and have a choice in the study, is informed by a feminist desire for eliminating power inequalities between researchers and participants and a concern for the difficulties of speaking for 'the other,'" they say (395).

Feminist researchers also advocate self-reflexivity as a way to avoid missionary activism and speaking for others. England defines self-reflexivity as "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as researcher" (244). One way this is achieved is through a discussion of the researcher's positionality. This allows the researcher to explore the ways in which intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and other

categories influence power relationships within the research project and their own interpretations of the data, spotting potential limitations. Though she is critical of aspects of self-reflexivity, discussed below, Nash quotes Audrey Kobayashi on its redeeming elements, stating that in its best form it "encourages exchanges with other scholars, seeks to advance an activist agenda, and seeks to promote discussion beyond the confines of any individual circumstance" (135). Linda Alcoff points out that it is problematic when a researcher misuses this concept by including autobiographical information at the beginning of her research with the pretense of understanding the limited situatedness of her own knowledge, but the information is really "used as a disclaimer against one's ignorance or errors and is made without critical interrogation of the bearing of such an autobiography on what is about to be said" (25). This, she says, places the real work of disentangling privilege and purpose on the reader, who is often a member of the marginalized group. Continued and careful consideration and open dialogue, however, can help alleviate this problem.

Queer Methodology

Queer methodology works as a framework for this textual analysis and interviewing because of the activist goals of this project. Queer methodology is focused on describing and subverting sexual binaries and power relations. Nash says, "What renders queer research distinctive is not only its underlying theoretical, epistemological and ontological starting points but its political commitment to promote radical social and political change that undermines oppression and marginalization . . . queer scholarship is distinctive in its political 'take' . . . that enables critical explorations of disciplined normative truths about gender, sexuality and sex that are embedded in contemporary relations between knowledge and power" (131). Since this

project aims to have LGBTQQIA activist applications, this methodology seems appropriate for those ends.

Like feminist methodology, queer methodology calls for critical self-awareness on the part of the researcher. Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt argue that "being aware of your own subject position, your positionality in relation to each participant's subject position, and how these might interact, is a useful way to start interrogating how the process of communication—entwined with networks of social power—affects the research process and its outcomes" (99). However, many people who write about queer methodology share Alcoff's skepticism about reflexivity as a cure-all for problems of the researcher-participant relationship.

Discussions of positionality can "degenerate into a privileged and self-indulgent focus on the self, that, in the power of doing, is the act that sets the researcher apart," Nash says (135). Nash complicates the idea of reflexivity based on the dynamic and complicated nature of subject positions. She talks about her research on transmen in Toronto. She says that though her subject position as a cisgender lesbian complicated her research relationships, they were changing and complicated. "'Positionality' and 'reflexivity'. . . are terms alluding to an at least momentarily stable place from which to be reflexive and to consider one's position. The relational slippages that surfaced between an 'old-time lesbian' and transmen over the course of individual interviews . . . are queer moments that are potentially less productive when we attempt to inflict stabilizing analyses based on 'positionality' and 'reflexivity'" (141). The changing nature of positionality may be one reason to consider it through the duration of a project rather than just at the beginning.

Queer methodology asks researchers and participants (or as Gordon Waitt calls them in *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, "co-researchers"—this is meant to deconstruct the

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researcher/participant binary) to be aware that power relationships between interviewers and interviewees, even in situations where researchers and participants are of different sexual subjectivities, are complicated. Waitt and his co-authors state, "notions of 'insider' and 'outsider' do not neatly map onto our experiences of communication in interview-based research with sexual minorities" (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt, 97). Instead, these researchers "emphasize the 'queerness' of interview dialogue and research relationships between sexual minority researchers and participants," which involves critical reflexivity on positionality and "challeng[ing] the processes which normalize and/or homogenize certain sexual and gender practices, relationships and subjectivities in contemporary society" (99). In this thesis, this means examining my own assumptions about sexualities and their implications and power relationships.

I used the strategies of feminist research, particularly the concepts of reciprocity and reflexivity, and of queer research, particularly being mindful of the complicated nature of power relationships and the political and social implications of my work, as I designed my research plan.

Participants

Interviewees are two visible activists in the Fort Collins community. I interviewed them for their expertise in and experience with queer activism. My interviews were in person and, with verbal permission and permission on the informed consent materials, tape recorded.

After recording, the interviews were transcribed and the participants were given the chance to review the transcriptions. They were encouraged to make amendments as necessary. This procedure was not meant to establish validity, which would imply that there is an objective,

monolithic activist agenda, but moreso to contribute to the reciprocal, collective knowledge-making grounded in queer and feminist methodologies.

In the forty-five minute interview with each activist, I asked them questions about their activist experiences, goals, methods, and challenges, what they see as the biggest issues facing the LGBTQQIA community, and what advice they would give to LGBTQQIA centers.

I used the information from the interviews to adapt my guidelines to the goals and challenges identified by the activists I interviewed. I attempted to make the guidelines open-ended so they could be adapted for the specific activist goals of any group.

Chapter 4: Activist Voices

Interviewee Portraiture

In order to complicate the discussion of LGBTQQIA activist goals and challenges that I constructed from texts, I did two interviews with LGBTQQIA activists in Fort Collins, Colorado. While texts on activism and theory gave me a broad framework for discussing activism and activist goals, the activists I interviewed were able to tell me about their situated methods, daily challenges, and their material circumstances, and I was able to ask them for specific feedback for LGBTQQIA writing groups.

In the context of my argument, these interviews serve both to incorporate the voices and perspectives of community activists and to complicate my discussion of activism based on texts that are more based on the theory of activism than with the specific stories that surround it. Primarily, I interviewed both activists for their expertise, the insights they have developed in their work. I attempted to employ a feminist and queer methodology, having conversations with activists that were reciprocal.

I am presenting these interviews in the same spirit, heeding DeVault and Gross's suggestion not to tame or impose on the ideas. I am imposing minimal interpretation of the activists' answers—though there is some, to situate their ideas within the context of this thesis.

In describing the "interpretive portraiture" she used to present interviews in Textual Orientations, Malinowitz says "no student [interviewee] is ever really representative, in any holistic or generic sense, of masses of people, no matter what his or her social identification; but as I read some of the surprising and unsurprising, familiar and idiosyncratic thinking of the students . .. I sensed that there was much that others could relate to and learn from" (158). These interviews are the same way; though every activist is uniquely situated, both of the activists I

interviewed offered insight pertinent to many LGBTQQIA activists, including myself as I develop guidelines.

Activists and their Goals and Experiences

Dana Zzyym

Dana is an LGBTQQIA activist in Fort Collins, Colorado. As an intersex person, she has been an advocate for access to resources for intersex people and ending genital surgery on intersex children, among other causes. She has been involved with Fort Collins' LGBTQQIA center in various capacities and is involved in a writing group that originated in that center.

Dana was first exposed to activism with Vietnam War Protests, but describes her route into activism as "[not] really a planned thing," but more as a move from personal need into action. She says:

> When I first realized that I had somehow belonged to—and I wasn't thinking in terms of queer, but now that I look back at it—the queer arena, I figured out I was severely depressed. I thought I was gay. I went to the University's counseling center and . . . they said "We'll work on the depression; you go work with the student alliance group."

Dana's experience challenges the binaristic tensions between therapy and activism because she pursued both, out of necessity. She talks about the local and larger political context that led her to activist work:

> Our biggest issue [at the student alliance] was the College Republicans, who would harass us every now and then, and we had a few white supremacists who would harass us every now and then and send us nasty little notes. Then Amendment Two[8] came along and that was kind of a do or die kind of thing; it felt like you either become an activist or go back in the closet because you felt like you needed to defend yourself, your life, and your friends.

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[8] Colorado's Amendment 2 prevented gay and lesbian people from being recognized as a protected class anywhere in the state. In 1996, it was overturned in the Supreme Court Case Romer v Evans.

Dana adds: "It wasn't until Amendment Two I really became involved in activism. That's where that went. It was rough, it was necessary, and it scared the shit out of me having to do those things but that's where I was."

Dana became involved in intersex activism based on similarly personal connections. Four years ago, she learned she is intersex. She says she always questioned her gender, but the details were hazy—all she knew was that she had had genital surgery as a child. "I didn't really even know what intersex was until then, I had heard the term 'hermaphrodite,'" she says. She discovered the meaning of intersex through personal research:

> It wasn't until I got divorced and really figured out [that] most of my emotional and mental health issues that had come from the surgery I had had when I was a kid. So I was reading stuff on the Internet about surgeries on the penis, because I was gender assigned male and that had failed and I was trying to figure out what was going on. All the different things I was reading, the surgery scars and tissues, didn't match up, and as I was going through I found this little term that popped up once or twice . . . intersex. I looked that up and that started to make a lot of sense to me.

However, Dana had to face concerns about reactions from therapists and about managing past trauma from the surgeries in order to confirm her findings:

> At that time I was just starting to go see a psychiatrist and a therapist, I didn't know if I should bring the issue up. I wasn't sure I'd be thrown out or not because I didn't know how the VA was going to react to gay issues. But I brought it up anyway because I thought it was necessary place for me to go because I had to find out. It took a while to get there because I had a lot of issues with doctors.
> One of the things that happened as a kid was, after the surgery, they always put me up on stirrups and checked out the surgery that I had, so doctors always freaked me out. It was like sexual assault. My therapist had to get me to the point where I was okay to ask a doctor to have them go and physically check things out. Once I did that, it confirmed that indeed I was an intersex person. I had to go through and have several doctors try to more identify and pinpoint which type of intersex condition I had, . . . [and] nobody can actually pinpoint which one it is.

Through her own extensive research, Dana has determined she is a pseudo-hermaphrodite male through developmental process, not through any other type of hermaphroditism. After learning

more fully about her history, Dana came to a place of anger. She describes how that anger

eventually became productive and fueled her activism:

> Once I got through being okay with being intersex—because I had to go through that internal process—and getting through anger with my parents for being silent all those years, I started realizing that there's not too many of us around and started reading it and about how doctors are telling parents not to talk about it, and kids sometime between birth and early childhood are having these surgeries without being able to say "no, we don't want it." That was kind of the birth of the current activism, just realizing that somebody needs to speak up. I started looking around for groups, other activists, people who were working towards the same kind of things and figuring out what I needed to do for me and what felt right.

In labeling herself in the context of the intersex community and intersex activism, Dana says, "I

consider myself hermaphrodite but the problem is that doesn't cover all intersex people. I think

the immediate concern is covering as many people as possible under one label." She says this is

because it is the best approach for activism, because the term intersex is gaining recognition

internationally as a gender identity, and notes that Nepal, South Africa, and Australia have begun

to recognize intersex as a gender.

Dana's Goals, Methods, and Challenges

Dana told me about several broad goals she has as an intersex activist. She says she does

not believe some of them will be realized in her lifetime. "My immediate goals . . . aren't really

going to affect me at this point," she says. Particularly, she talks about ending surgeries on

intersex children:

> I really want to do is protect the future children that are being born so they don't have to go through the hell that I went through. I want them to be able to grow up and make a choice for themselves. . . All intersex normalization surgeries are cosmetic, every one of them. There are other intersex surgeries, but the normalization surgeries are all cosmetic. Those are the ones that need to be stopped.

One of the challenges to this goal, Dana says, is the view that intersex normalization surgery is a medical decision that parents should retain the right to make. She says, "I understand that point. I just disagree with it when it comes to the long term. If [intersex children] are able to make the decision for themselves in the long term, they should be able to make that decision for themselves."

One of Dana's other activist goals is in many ways linked with stopping normalization surgeries. Legal recognition of intersex as a gender category would help call into question the reasoning behind normalization surgery. This recognition would also help intersex adults. Dana says it would mean recognition "as a human being." One approach to this goal would be advocating for intersex as a third gender. Though she says she is not sure if male/female/intersex is the perfect system, she says, "that's kind of where I'm heading because I think that's the only way to get human rights recognition." The benefit of legal recognition is that it puts laws into place to recognize and protect intersex people. Dana cites Nepal, where they recognize a third gender. "[Now] they have to start recognizing it legally, and start putting laws into place," Dana says. One way Dana is working towards this goal is approaching the Colorado Department of Motor Vehicles to have her gender listed as intersex. She plans to ask to have her gender marked as "I" on her drivers' license. She is going to go to the DMV with written confirmation that she is intersex and continue to ask to talk to supervisors until she talks to someone willing to make the change. She told me that eventually, the higher-ups of the people at the DMV are elected officials, so this is one potential path to legal change.

Another activist project that Dana is currently researching is what she describes as "genocide through legalized medical abortion." She says the concepts of eugenics and genocide came up in a chat group online with one of her intersex groups. This meshed with some of the

reading she was doing about how the number of intersex normalization surgeries was declining. "The book I was reading at the time . . . tried to explain that away by saying that the doctors just no longer wanted to do the operations, and I thought to myself that didn't sound true. That got me thinking, I have to really look into this eugenics part," she says. She talks about how the number of intersex normalization surgeries is declining to an extent, but says it is because fewer intersex people are being born. She says, "[doctors] call it us a genetic defect when they're getting the pre-natal genetic testing," something she says contributes to the number of abortions and to the lack of accurate statistics surrounding this issue. She says there are "no statistics on really how many intersex people are being born, and . . . no statistics on how many of us are being aborted." Her activist goal is to research the numbers behind this concept and to determine ways to present it. She describes it as, "something I'm trying to work on my own, getting the information to prove that genocide is actually going on." Dana believes that doctors have a role in this. "With intersex issues, [medical professionals] direct the parents on what direction they ought to go. When it comes to medical abortions, they direct them on what they call a severe genetic disorder, and really their child will just be a gender variant and with a lot of love the child will be perfectly normal and have a happy life," she says. Dana has struggled with how to present this project. She says she has asked herself, "[h]ow am I really going to equate this and get people to really understand? All I really can tell you is that the numbers on some of these things [intersex surgeries] have really plummeted. I had to figure out how to present that." In discussing her activist methods, Dana talks a lot about these kinds of rhetorical decisions she has to make.

To demonstrate how she makes rhetorical decisions as an activist, Dana and I talked about her recent trip to Philadelphia for the White House Conference on LGBT Health. "Intersex

people were not invited—there was no "I" on [the acronym]—so I invited myself," she says. This was one way Dana protested this erasure and the potential belief that intersex people are not stakeholders in health issues affecting some members of the LGBT community. By attending the conference and asking questions, she asserted herself as a stakeholder. Dana told me about some of the audience-based strategies she used at the conference, and some of the tensions between approaches that might be considered more radical and approaches that might be considered more liberal.

"I was talking to a friend about this the other day and she said people had heard I went to Philadelphia and just read em' the riot act," Dana says. While she did feel angry about the erasure of intersex issues from the conference, she talks about her decision to approach the conference with consideration for the best way to talk to this large, influential audience. She explains:

> Trying to talk these huge groups . . . is like beating my head against a brick wall. I'm not getting across what I need to get across. I need to change my approach. I compared some of my approaches on the plane and thought about what's been most effective. I realized trying to rationalize and showing them what's going on—instead of forcing [the idea] down their throats—has been a better approach.

She talks specifically about her thought process as she developed a question for a panel at the conference:

> The Health and Human Services Department had a panel of experts on LGBT issues and housing and health services. They had a question and answer section afterwards and I stood up and asked a question, basically asking them about this . . . intersex health and intersex issues. Basically, I told them among the 500 people or so that were there, I was the only intersex person. [I told them] I felt oppressed [because] the "I" was invisible on [their acronym].

It took Dana some time to formulate the questions she would ask and how she would ask them. "I was listening to them at the panel and thought, yelling at these people is really not going to help anything," she says. One of the reasons for this is that she thinks of herself as an ally to

others in the LGBTQQIA community who were represented at the conference, as well. "The things being said were pretty positive for the LGBT community, which most of my friends come from; I don't want to shoot them down because that's part of my community," she says. Based on her desire to approach this audience in a convincing way, Dana says, "I . . . rewrote my question probably 8 or 9 times during that session."

In the end, Dana felt the panel did not answer her question. "Their answer was basically . . . 'we do kind of talk about intersex being a part of this,' and then they moved on to the next question from somebody else," she says. However, overall, she feels her approach worked with the audience at the panel. She says, "[c]hanging my approach worked. I had like 6 people come up and ask about intersex and my life, and [who] just wanted to know more details about stuff. Some people dropped off business cards. I got a semi-invite to a conference in San Francisco for the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association."

In other activist endeavors, Dana renegotiates her approach constantly. Mostly, she says, she no longer uses radical tactics. "Most think I'm this radical activist but I've changed my methods," she says. She talks specifically about some of her methods:

> I do panels, I talk about intersex issues. [I went to] the Transforming Gender Conference in Boulder . . . last weekend. [I went to] the Martin Luther King event on campus . . . and had a . . . poster on a stick and sat there in the audience and watched the performances and the talks. A couple of people would ask what [the sign] meant and I would talk to them one on one on intersex issues and what it meant to me. That's how I try to educate people, one person at a time, and one classroom at a time.

She says there are still tensions, though. "I no longer try to be confrontational. When I first came out and I had anger issues. I still have my moments; don't get me wrong. When I get dumb questions I get ticked off. . . and I think 'Wow, why don't people get this?'"

Many of the challenges to Dana's activist work are more material than rhetorical. On her

biggest obstacles to activism, she says:

> Money is the biggest issue. Being disabled is another one. If I had gone to Philadelphia being able-bodied, driving there or going there and finding some shelter to spend the night would have been fine . . . Being disabled, I had to make sure I had a place to stay and accessibility. . . It costs me a bit more money to do things. . . It's not like I'm young and can drive straight through. I have pain issues [and] I have medication I have to take, which doesn't allow me to drive at certain times. I have to work around those issues. . . I'm on a limited income now as well.

Material limitations are an example of a factor in activism that is rarely accounted for in

theoretical framings of activism. Dana's discussion of material factors demonstrates that the

issues facing activists are much more situated than theoretical limitations would indicate.

To understand how Dana sees herself fitting into the larger picture of queer activism, I

asked her about what she sees as the most pressing issues facing the LGBTQQIA community.

While she has thoughts on the priorities of the movement, in many ways she feels shut out from

decision-making. This is the question, again, of making people who do not think she is a

stakeholder realize that she is one. She says:

> For me most of those doors are shut to even talk to [people in areas of leadership] about [the movement's priorities] because they don't want to talk to me about my issues and what I think is important. Part of that is [because] some people don't think intersex is part of the queer community, [and] part of that is [because] they think if they accept [intersex issues] that it might lower or devalue some of their legitimacy.

From this standpoint, however, Dana sees ways in which the queer activist community

could re-evaluate their priorities. For example, she believes there is too much emphasis on

marriage equality to the exclusion of other pressing concerns. "While I think [marriage equality

is] important I don't think that's the most important thing going on. Certainly health and safety is

a lot more important. [As well as] the trans and intersex community," she says. She also talks

about the lack of attention to intersections between gender identity and race. [Transgender and

intersex people] of color have a lot of limitations for jobs and healthcare," she notes, and says, "[those issues] should be a higher priority than getting equality in marriage." She recommends outreach to various communities, especially "communities that it's hard for people to come out in like in the Hispanic/Latino community." She advises LGBTQQIA centers to be aware of this. She suggests, for example, if a community center is located in an area that is primarily white, "you'll have a hard time drawing in the Hispanic populations, which would be a sad thing to do because . . . everybody needs to have a voice and a place to go." An issue that directly affects her participation in the queer activist community is the lack of attention to intersex issues. Dana advises LGBTQQIA community centers to:

> Think about being more inclusive. . . They really need to start making their resources available to everybody else. Have those resources for intersex people, therapists, reconstructive surgeons, support groups and things like that available. Same thing for queer questioning people, people who identify as genderqueer, allies and all others, androgynous, finding and providing resources for them. Put that in the communications so that people know right up front that we're welcoming to everybody.

Erika Truman

Erika, a GBLTQIA+ activist in Fort Collins, Colorado, describes her activism as local and community-based. "My activist work will always have to be with my neighbors, my community," she says. "It's just going to be a part of my life and that's it." Though she had done some work on campaigns and some informal work in social movements, she did not think of herself as an activist in official terms until 2009, when she was referred by a friend to a job at a queer rights organization. Though she had intended to "buy a motorhome and travel the country," she met her wife and decided to stay in Fort Collins. When she left her job at the organization, she started a consulting business that works for GLBTQIA+ equality. Her business

is designed to respond to the needs of the community and some of the gaps in the current services available in the community.

Formally, Erika considers herself an activist because, as she says, "It's sort of required if you're in a marginalized population." The consulting business she started reflects many of Erika's activist goals and methods. She offers workshops that use experiential learning to foster empathy and inclusion for GLBTQIA+ people. She does the workshops at places of business and other organizations, and she charges for them, for a rhetorical reason I will explain below. Erika bases her methods for experiential learning on the work of Dorothy Riddle, and she defines experiential learning as "[a]ctivities . . . that draw out an emotional or physiological response in the participants" to foster empathy. "I use examples that will apply to people so that they experience it themselves, and then can apply that physical sensation, emotional response, psychological response to somebody else so that they can understand and have empathy," she says. As part of this method, she adds, "I'm not telling someone how to feel or be; I'm introducing an opportunity for them to think or feel on their own and then they report back to me. I ask a lot of questions and they report back to me their new realizations." For example, she talks about some of the emotional barriers to inclusion and provides exercises for understanding their emotional and physiological impact. She explains:

> I do a lot of work around attitudes towards difference. . . [the attitudes can] include repulsion, pity, tolerance, acceptance, support, admiration, appreciation, and embracing. I get people for two hours talking about what these attitudes sound like, look like, feel like, because if we don't know what these attitudes sound like, look like, feel like, we don't know when we're in them. . . we can say that we're accepting, but we may be acting out of pity or tolerance . Tolerance isn't a very good thing to feel, I don't want to be tolerated . . . I don't even want to be accepted because when I'm accepted, someone else is excluded. I want to be supported for exactly who I am. It's taking those [attitudes towards difference] and really understanding what they are so that people can know when they're in them.

To help her participants understand these feelings towards difference and their impact, Erika

leads them through things like "physical therapy exercises [to help people feel] what happens in

your body when you think about something scary. Your hands start shaking; your stomach gets

upset. That's an icky feeling." Then she makes the connection for her participants: "Why is that

an important thing to know? Imagine leaving your house and feeling that with every single

interaction that you go into." She also does an activity to help participants understand "how

important it is for someone to have a name for themselves—but that they get to name

themselves, we don't get to name them." :

> [I talk] about the terms are you "in a relationship" or "alone," and [ask] everyone in the
> room [to] apply one of those two words to themselves. [We discuss] how uncomfortable
> it is to say either one of them, especially because there's always someone in the room
> who's not in a relationship. . . Everyone gets worked up about how they feel left out and
> how mean it is, and so we talk about how I don't get to name them as "alone" and we
> don't get to name them as "alone" but they could say that for themselves if they wanted
> to . . . but they're probably not going to choose that term.

Erika also tailors her workshops to her specific audience. For example, recently, she gave a

workshop to a group of students in a teacher-training program. With that group, she focused on

making the activities center around things that a GLBTQI+ student might experience.

> We spent a lot of time talking about the fight-or-flight response and fear, because once
> the fight-or-flight response kicks in, it takes 24 hours for our body to chill out. If there's a
> 14-year-old gay young man or possibly-gay young man who's getting his fight-or- flight
> response kicked off every hour because somebody says something mean, he can't
> concentrate on math or physics or anything. The other thing I really stress to them, is if
> the outcome you're looking for is to have a successful students, this matters to you. . .
> Your job is to keep your people safe. So I go back to the simple stuff of how do you
> make room for your students, how do you make your students feel safe, and what's the
> outcome you're looking for, and that applies to everything.

This focus on experience over language, data, and statistics, which are common

components of inclusion training and ally safe-zone training sessions, is intentional. Instead of

spending her workshop time on terminology, which can easily take up the entire session, she

refs people to places where they can find this kind of information online and then uses

workshops for experiential education activities. One of the reasons she does it this way is that:

> So many people who are doing trainings and work are so focused on using the "right"
> word and doing it the "right" way, like there's only one right way. . . . [T]here's not just
> one right way to get along with another person. There's not just one right way to talk to
> someone who's marginalized . . . I was even offended by [insistence on the "right"
> language], being a person who identifies as gay or lesbian or queer, depending on the
> day. I was offended by all of this terminology because it puts people in boxes.

That is not to say that language is not important, but Erika argues that language should not be

presented as rigid or as the same for everyone. She says that while prescribing language use is

not the goal of her workshops, she has a strong sense of the language she uses because

"[l]anguage is so important because language affects our culture, but our culture affects our

language," she says. For this reason, she examines the way her language choices frame her

workshops.

For example, Erika's choice to use the word "inclusion" instead of "diversity" is

intentional. In previous chapters I discussed some of the critiques queer pedagogues have for the

goal of inclusion, but Erika talks about how inclusion as a concept works well for her purpose

and her various audiences for her workshops. She says, "When I started my own work, I really

focused on the word inclusion instead of diversity because everybody is different. . . every

person is different from every other person. . . So how do we make enough room for everybody

at an event in programming?" She talks about how the concept of inclusion reflects the

interconnectedness of types of marginalization:

> Inclusion is so simple: how do we make room for someone? Getting the focus and
> emphasis away from queer, for example, and into difference, because people with
> disabilities are treated with as much crap as queer people are and it's the same principle,
> anyone who's different or not exactly the same as me deserves to be treated like crap.
> That's why [people use] words like "That's so gay" or "That's retarded."

"I would love to start changing the culture of activism for LBGT rights as well and the way that we talk about it," she says.

This perspective developed as she worked as part of a queer rights organization. Erika recalls feeling limited by the activist methods being used there. "I went through an existential breakdown with it because I thought my whole purpose was to do this work but I can't do this work well under the system that we have," she says. This is one of the reasons Linsday started her business—to fill in some of the gaps she saw in the activist system in which she was working.

Erika's approach differs from that of many other activists, including others doing training workshops, in several ways. One of the ways that her approach is different is language, as discussed above. Her use of the word inclusion as discussed above is one way that her approach differs, and like the reasoning for that choice, many of the approaches Erika takes are based on rhetorical framing and positioning. For example, one of the main reasons she charges money for the workshops—she runs her business as for-profit rather than as a non-profit, which is different than many people who do training—is because of how it frames the responsibility for inclusion. She says:

> I charge money for the consultations I do now because I believe businesses have the responsibility of knowing their clientele; it's their job to learn how to interact with people in the best way possible. It's their job to learn best practices. It's not the non-profit's job to reach out to those organizations and try to fight their way in. It's really backwards. When I've framed it that way to the part of the society that's not marginalized, suddenly they get it in a different way. Instead of seeing the fight or the struggle, they see a professional who really understands how society works and how to apply changes to it.

This focus on a cooperative vs antagonistic stance is one of the ways Erika sets her work aside from nonprofit work, which she has found to have many gaps when it comes to the types of activist goals she would like to achieve.

Many of Erika's critiques of nonprofit methods are related to how people are framed in social work discourse. She has seen marginalized and non-marginalized people cast as "us and them," and she has also seen problems with casting people as heroes, villains, and victims, which I will elaborate on below. There are a number of factors she sees as contributing to these labels.

First, she notes that nonprofits are usually staffed with social workers. While social workers are trained to help and empower individuals and groups, they are not trained "to educate, facilitate, and develop teams so that people are more included," which is work they often end up doing. Because of their focus on individuals and groups rather than on the larger picture of inclusion, Erika says:

> A lot of the non-profit industry really fights really hard to get into organizations, and there's an "us against them" mentality—there's "us" the marginalized people, and then there's "them," the non-marginalized people—and we have to fight hard to be a part of "them" and we want it really bad, but when we get the opportunity to have it, we don't actually take it, we fight harder to be "us" and to be "them."

This tension can be viewed as a part of a larger conversation on the goals of activism in the way that some activists have framed liberal and radical activism. Erika's sense of purpose for her work, however, gives her a clear sense of her response to this tension. "I actually did want the outcome of all of us [marginalized and non-marginalized people] being a part of something together," she says. This is why she places emphasis in her workshops on inclusion and empathy. Nonprofits' focus on teaching the "right" language is a barrier to inclusion, she argues. "It was really frustrating to see how much shame and guilt I saw in the people were not marginalized and how much fear they had in including us because they were so afraid they were going to mess up," she says. She prefers and approach that lets her "really engage with the parts of our communities who are not marginalized and how they can include people of difference—and not just awareness. We spend so much time talking about awareness, but really, who doesn't have a

clue that there's people who are treated differently in our society? . . . So how do we engage and apply?"

Another concern Erika talks about in terms of how nonprofits frame roles comes from the idea that nonprofits and academia (where social workers are trained) are using "outdated models" of activism that cast people as heroes, villains, and victims. This perspective limits change and agency for marginalized people. Erika says, "[it's] this outdated social work system where the social worker is the gatekeeper, the social worker has the power, the social worker knows best all the time no matter what, even when somebody is ready for something else." Erika talks about the effect this has on marginalized people:

> The social worker or professional or activist knows best and everyone else is clueless and/or evil. There's a hero/villain/victim thing going on that doesn't make any sense to me. I don't need a hero and I don't need to be one, and I think it's really disempowering to people to have a hero step in with a big cape and come in and fix everything.

Erika also identifies some of the material challenges of working in nonprofit settings. She suggests that LGBTQQIA community centers:

> Find ways to actually pay staff a livable wage. Another problem with the non-profit sector is that the people, the professionals that work in it, don't make enough. It's impossible to be a source of empowerment for others if you can't have an empowered life of your own. If the employees of the non-profit aren't paid a living wage they're not going to do good work.

As a result of this limitation, Erika has decided that for her own activism, "it's not going to be a paid job ever, but I'm also not going to be an official volunteer, it's just going to be a part of my life and that's it. Aside from the business that I do which is again a for-profit, that kicks back to community members as well."

Some of Erika's ideas for addressing the role-related issues that face nonprofit

LGBTQQIA community centers involve shifting agency to the community and addressing the

material needs of community members. She says:

> In my perfect world, we would invest in human capital, which is the people who work for the community and as a part of the community, and spend less money on the material items like the building, and then we could use spaces and other centers. What is also true is that some people are so terrified, marginalized, and afraid that they do want a dark alley, a back door entrance, and so it would be interesting to look at how to make something like that more plausible. Not having enough money to spend on heat, and food, and different items that go into running a center was really frustrating. I also wish it was easier for community members to take on amenity and not have to have a center. That gets really political, because is it the government's job, is it the non-profits job, or is it the community's job? If the community was doing their job would we need to have non-profits? If the non-profit wasn't doing it would people automatically do it? That gets crazy.

Further, centers and community advocates need to be willing to be open to criticism and change.

She says that when she worked at a community center, "I had to be really open to hearing

people's complaints, because if the center is the only place that someone feels safe and they

don't feel safe there, there's a problem." One way to address the material needs of community

members is through research and statistics. Though she says statistics do not always reflect

peoples' complicated realities, "I think it's still really valuable to know. It's something that

people pay attention to. Once we have a statistic of how many people feel like they didn't get a

job because they're gay, or got fired because they're gay, and once we have those numbers it's

so much easier to put them to work and start applying work into the community and start to see

where we need to pay attention." This, too, can be complicated by material constraints, which is

why centers need to do outreach. Erika says:

> Within the queer community, especially in more rural areas like ours—and I'm sure it's true in urban areas as well—there's people who don't have access to a computer and there's people who don't show up to the center, and so you really have to start talking to people. You do have to go to the bar, you do have to go to the homeless shelter, you have

to go to lots of places because a lot of the queer community doesn't have access to the same stuff and they're terrified to put it on paper or especially put it into a digital realm because they're scared that someone's going to find out.

This kind of outreach would be necessary for writing groups based in LGBTQQIA centers, as well. Below I will discuss the advice Erika and Dana had for implementing writing groups specifically. First, however, I would like to discuss how Erika talks about how her own activist goals fit into how she sees the goals and needs of the LGBTQQIA community as a whole.

Erika does not necessarily align herself with any one particular cause that queer activists advocate for, such as marriage equality. While she says it's all important, she says there's "so much fight involved" in the us-vs-them activist culture that it makes it hard to advance broader issues. For example, Erika says the most pressing problem facing the LGBTQQIA community is "the shame created by society's disregard or lack of attention, meaning that the marginalized folks, the LGBTQI+ folks are totally invisible, and when they are visible, they're shed in a really negative light by society and individuals." She talks about the broad implications of shame for both members of the LGBTQQIA community and for people who otherwise queer gender expectations. This can lead to internalized heterosexism, cissexism, and sexism. She explains, "shame is, 'I'm a bad person,' not 'I've done something I'm not proud of.' Shame is hugely destructive, and there's plenty of research that shows how destructive shame is." Like Sedgwick, she argues that the implications of this are far-reaching for people who identify as sexual or gender identity minorities and for people who do not. She says:

> [Shame] affects every person, not just GLBTQI+ people. It affects the little girl who dresses as a tomboy, gets all of this negative attention because of it, and then is afraid to go to medical school when she's in her early 20s because she thinks she can't do it. Anything that has to do with biological sex, gender, gender roles and orientation are all rooted in the same stupid gender stuff and it affects every individual, so I think yeah, there's a lot of pressing issues for this population specifically, but it affects all of us. There's so much that stems from shame: there's the suicide rates, depression, the

worthiness, the lack of worthiness, and that's kind of the root that feeds to every other problem there is.

Though Erika talks about this shame as a root to many issues, she does identify some conflicts in the queer activist community. One of them, which she discussed in the tensions between the work nonprofits are doing and the re-framing that she and others are doing, is about how to do the work. Another is how the community is defined. Who is considered a stakeholder in queer activism? Her response to this question is rooted in the broad problem of shame discussed above. She says:

> [The conflict is] should we say GLBT, LBGT, BLGTIQ? Should we use the word queer? Should we include trans issues? Should we include intersex? Every person has an opinion on that alone, who do we serve. I believe we serve anyone along the biological sex continuum—which is a continuum—anyone along the gender continuum, and anyone along the orientation continuum, and then there's a sex and intimacy continuum, which is not the same as sexual orientation. . . We should group them all together because we all deal with the same shame and bullshit from society. That's the reason we're all grouped together, is because of society's response to us. We could start eking out the details between all these definitions or we could come to the realization that society sucks and we're all trying to work within the same system.

Erika's broad focus on the roles of emotion and experience in marginalization and creating unity among groups is apparent in her methods and philosophies.

Synthesis

These activists demonstrate that the literature on queer activism, which often seeks to delineate distinct types of activism and groups of perspectives, does not account for the complicated positions of activists. Both Dana's and Erika's approaches are contextually situated. They adjust their approach based on audience and purpose, blending tactics that would be considered radical and liberal, both queer and identity-based. For example, Dana both establishes dialogue in governmental and educational contexts and challenges the problematic two-gender

system for drivers' licenses by fighting for something new, tactics that might represent both liberal and radical activism. Erika both resists the concept of labels that limit identity and imply that it is static and she deliberately names her goal as inclusion, something more likely to be associated with identity politics.

Both activists respond to their rhetorical situations, thinking about the best way to communicate their purposes to their audiences. I think of Dana re-writing her question for the conference several times before deciding how to phrase it in a way that would resonate with the conference audience despite her own anger surrounding the issues, and Erika tailoring her workshops to make sure participants understand why it is important to them. For example, she adjusts her examples for teachers who want their students to learn successfully. They both negotiate their stakeholder roles as audience, purpose, and context shift. This adaptability is not necessarily reflected (at least not explicitly) in much of the literature on queer activism. Based on their experiences and on their knowledge of my purpose and audience as I develop a curriculum for LGBTQQIA writing groups, both Dana and Lindsey had suggestions for the best ways to implement the writing groups.

Activist Participant Suggestions for the Workshop

Erika's suggestions deal with how to structure the group and maintain flattened power structures. Her advice is specific to the context of an LGBTQQIA community center. She says:

> [There may be some] queer activists who say that a social worker needs to run the group, or a therapist needs to run the group because you just don't know what's going to happen. I think that's crap. I think a writing group can be run by anyone. If we attach the social worker/therapist because the issue is so sensitive, we're just reinforcing how bad it is when in reality being queer is a part of reality, and anyone who is queer, anything that they struggle with, if it's not a direct result of society, it's just like any other problem that any other person has. Absolutely do the best job that you can and then have a list of therapists which for any writing group you would want to have because you don't know

what's going to come out in writing. If you have a vet in the room, if you have someone who's had an abortion, I mean anything that's hard, you would want to be able to pass that on. It wouldn't matter what the topic was, to have some good referrals for those folks.

Erika's advice is in line with Jenny Horsman's suggestions for being prepared to refer people to therapists in the community. It also lines up with Catherine Fox's argument that safe spaces (which, in many senses, a writing group does need to be, but not in the sense that it should be considered therapy) are pathologizing. Erika's point that treating queer writers as particularly in need of therapy is problematic confirms this. Her argument also lines up with Karla Jay's critique of her negative experiences with C-R as therapy.

Dana's suggestions for the writing group are about establishing trust in particular ways. This is important to any writing group, but she talks about the ways that it has been important for her in her own experiences in a writing group. "I didn't grow up with girls as a normal part of my life, so I felt awkward quite often," she says. "Trust is a major issue for me personally. I didn't have a lot of trust growing up in my life." She says that these resulted in a lot of anger and uncertainty as to who she could express that anger to. "In the beginning [of my participation in a writing group] I didn't know how I would be coming across and if I would be accepted. Now that everyone knows that I'm intersex and that I have an anger attitude issue about being intersex and what happened to me and everyone seems okay with that, I'm a lot more comfortable and I need to express that in my writing," she says. She has several ideas about how to establish that comfortable environment.

First, there should be agreed-upon rules about confidentiality. "What comes up in writing group, stays in writing group," she says. "We're writing about personal stuff. That kind of thing for me, knowing that I wasn't going to be talked about and being able to trust all of you and me learning that it's okay, was a big factor." She also suggests that once the trust within the group is

established, it should not add new core members unless everyone agrees to it. Concretely, she suggests establishing trust early-on with low-stakes, comfortable writing prompts so group members can get to know each other. She says these could be "gentle type personal icebreakers" asking about opinions on less-controversial things instead of "intimate, personal details." Once trust is established, groups can transition to higher-stakes, more personal writing. Dana says it is important to "Build comfortable environments for people to free flow their thought patterns. You have to make people comfortable, that anything goes, their anger their frustrations, their prejudices because we all have them. It's okay to vent them here."

Dana also notes that LGBTQQIA centers should do outreach when first forming writing groups. "I think helping people find their voices, or those isolated and finding those that like to write whether they're queer voices or not and inviting them in," she says, and notes that if no one had reached out to her, she probably would not have joined a writing group.

Chapter 5: Activist Writing Group Curriculum

Developing the Exercises

All the writing exercises and group practices in this chapter are influenced by the goals of queer pedagogy or queer activism generally. Some draw specifically from queer pedagogical theory texts, adapting exercises based on common material conditions and expectations of community writing groups and LGBTQQIA community centers. There is room for adaptation of the exercises so groups can account for their own goals and circumstances. In other cases, the writing exercises are connected to prompts I have used in community writing or have created for community writing and adapted those for Queer activism. For each exercise, there is an explanation of how it fits into this framework. Throughout the chapter, writing exercises appear in boxes.

The section begins with exercises that may help groups develop goals and projects and move towards more critical approaches. That said, groups may find that the exercises work differently for them. Groups should think of these exercises as jumping-off points for their goals however they envision them, and they should feel free to adapt suggested prompts for their own purposes.

My perspective here is limited. I am writing from my social location as an ally, limiting my understanding of the impacts of the heterosexism that affords me privilege. I am as an activist who has some radical ideals, but is practicing liberal methods—although I may favor the concept that our culture is built on heterosexist and sexist principles that need to be interrogated, I am currently working through a master's thesis written for the conventions of academia, within the frameworks of established conventions of community writing and queer pedagogies, and advocating work within LGBTQQIA community centers. These existing systems are set up for

more liberal forms of activism. Groups are encouraged to revise, expand, or deconstruct these guidelines as they see fit for their activist goals.

Establishing Community Discourse

Who Should Lead?

Many of the limitations of the goals of activism discussed in Chapter 3 are based on issues of oppression and dominance. For example, Jay's anecdotes reveal group leaders in C-R trying to control how women in the group interpret their own experiences, and Mathieu critiques intercultural inquiry for placing "college mentors" in the role of problem-solving facilitators. Outcomes of efforts towards visibility have been somewhat homonormative, favoring gender-normative white gay and lesbian people and often excluding transgender, intersex, and genderqueer people. Further, many of the issues faced by pedagogues have dealt with problems of institutional power structures, where the power of the teacher limits transformative action and student safety. All of these are examples of how dominant perspectives can silence others.

These reproductions of dominance can happen even in spaces that have been established as "safe." Fox relates a narrative about tensions surrounding racism and sexism in a university's GLBT office as the students planned a queer conference to examine the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and sexuality. As students from various groups converged in the GBLT office to plan the conference, Fox says:

> White students routinely talked over students of color . . . or simply ignored them; students of color were also expected to do the "cultural work" for the conference, that is, to build bridges with various student-of-color organizations. . . The word "bitch" frequently circulated around the office, overtly sexualized gestures and behaviors pervaded office banter and some lesbians were called "man-hating bitches" when disagreements arose. (499)

Exclusion is not always so blatant in community groups; Jay recalls that feminist C-R groups were unwilling to address class and race issues, for example, and says that there was a sexist climate at New York's Gay Liberation Front (GLF) meetings. "Some of the other women and I were constantly correcting men who called us 'girls,'" she says. "I'm a woman, not a girl. How would you like me to call you boy?' we'd remind them over and over." Some community centers only offer resources to LGBT people, not addressing (either through lack of resources, knowledge, or care) the needs of other sexual and gender minorities. These issues could be exacerbated by a group leader, whose singular perspective may not be enough to address them. This is also connected with the point Erika made that a therapist or social worker might have a different perception of his or her own role as a facilitator than the rest of the group might need.

For these reasons, community groups should run on a shared governance model , with group facilitation and decision-making and with attention to flattening hierarchy.

How to Work Towards Flattened Hierarchies

Flattened hierarchies that respect the goals and agency of all of the members of a group are constructed through frequent reflection on the part of all of the group members. According to Fox, this type of reflection requires that:

> Each of us is accountable for creating the conditions that allow for safe(r) spaces. This takes a degree of reflexivity about our own subject positions and how we are all multiply positioned in relation to power, privilege, and oppression and the larger forces of white heteronormativity that constantly pull us into normalizing gestures" (507)

Before beginning writing activities, it is important that the writing group establish their own definition of safe space. The literature of safe spaces for the classroom helps us understand how

to do this, complemented here by suggestions from the two activists interviewed. Holley and

Steiner summarize the literature on how to create a safe classroom this way:

> A number of authors recommend setting up discussion ground rules or guidelines . . .
> and having students design their own norms for class discussions. . . . Using storytelling
> as a way of creating shared experience . . . and discussing social identities to normalize
> students' feelings . . . are additional methods that have been described as creating safe
> space through reinforcing common understanding.

Adapted for LGBTQQIA writing groups, these strategies are in line with Dana's suggestion that

confidentiality and comfort with the group should be established early on with ground rules and

with more comfortable prompts for writing and discussion so group members can get to know

each other better with lower-stakes writing and know that the space is receptive to them.

Activity: Establishing Ground Rules:

- What do you expect from the group to feel safe in this space?
- What do you expect from the group to feel respected in this space?
- What are your thoughts on confidentiality in this space?
- What are your goals as an activist? What types of projects would you like to see the group work towards?
- What other ground rules would you like to see in place for this group?

When people have had a chance to write their answers, the group should either anonymously give them to one person who will list them where everyone can see them or the group should share their responses. The group should discuss their responses, including conflicting ones and questions like how to balance confidentiality and public activism. The aim of this activity is to create a set of ground rules for workshop, which, as I will discuss in the next section, should be revisited as needed.

Groups should not view the ground rules they establish as an ending point. As goals,

political context, and relationships shift, group members should have the ability to raise the rules

for re-evaluation. Fox says-, "we must engage safety as a process through which we establish

dialogues that create and re-create the conditions in which queer folks are more free from the

physical and psychic violence of those normalizing processes through which we all move and

operate" (506). Further, if working towards activist ends, groups looking to establish a safe space

should continually reevaluate the tension between safety and danger, adjusting as trust builds and according to their activist goals. In discussing her queer-pedagogy classroom, Malinowitz says:

> An awareness of [danger] always hovering at the border of one's speech inspires resistance to it, and the dance of this danger and this resistance can lead to a multivoiced discourse that subjects writing from zones of relative 'safety' lack. So I didn't want my class to be a place in which students would entirely forget about the danger, but rather be in a place in which they could, from something like the provisionally protected space of an embassy in a hostile country, peer out at it and examine what it was in their relationship to the danger that invigorated—not just stifled—their literacy [or in our case, activist] acts" (113).

Along the same lines, Fox warns those in search of safe spaces not to conflate safety with comfort, noting that creating the idea of a monolithic queer experience in the name of intimacy is reductive and erases "queers who are marked 'other' by race and gender" (500). Members of the group should be open to the fact that the experiences of the others in the group might challenge their own understanding of experiences. Fox notes how this can be productive, saying, "embracing the ineffable can move us to envision safe(r) places, places that are created through dialogue, struggle, and practice. We can embrace the (un)knowable even as we seek to know more—about the specificities of others' lives and how our lives and subjectivities intersect and collide with theirs" (508).

Establishing Comfort with the Group: Icebreaker Writing or Sharing Questions

These questions are designed for writing and sharing so group members can get to know each other with lower stakes until trust is established. These examples are just jumping-off points/examples.

Courtesy of CSU's Community Literacy Centers' "Ideas to Get You Writing":
- The strangest dream I ever had
- These are some things I do very well:
- If I could change the world I would do the following:
- The present I would like to receive

Courtesy of Dana Zzyym:
- Reflect on the color purple

Other community writing prompts:
- What are your pet peeves?

- I am obsessed with . . .

Another Icebreaker: Six-Word Memoirs

Six-Word Memoirs, a genre sparked by Hemingway's six-word story, have been popularized by the storytelling publication *Smith Magazine*. It challenges writers, "Can you tell your life story in six words?" ("The Six-Word Memoir Project"). Examples include Stephen Colbert's "Well, I thought it was funny," and Joan Rivers' "Liars: hysterectomy didn't improve sex life" (CBSnews). Smith notes that they can be "bittersweet ('Cursed with cancer, blessed with friends') and poignant ('I still make coffee for two') to the inspirational ('Business school? Bah! Pop music? Hurrah') and hilarious ('I like big butts, can't lie')" ("The Six-Word Memoir Project").

This activity does not completely evade the problem some LGBTQQIA folks run into with expressivist writing. New members in writing groups may have some of the concerns about trust that Dana mentioned, and a personal writing prompt can feel like a demand for more information than you are comfortable disclosing. One of the reasons six-word memoirs work well as icebreakers, however, is that because they are so small, writers can be very selective about what sliver of their life they want to capture with this form. Writers who are not yet comfortable can write about a hobby or a less-emotionally-charged memory.

Here are Rachel Fershleiser's "Six Tips for Great Six-Word Memoirs:"

1. Be specific. "Homecoming king with a septum ring" says more than just "punk but popular"; "We are banned from Wal-Mart forever"—not just "my family is embarrassing."

2. Be honest. Many of the most interesting memoirs are so raw ("First time hazy. Blame the booze"; "Hung myself. Sister found me. Alive") I'd personally be too chicken to put my name on them.

3. Forget the thesaurus: Choose interesting words, but only ones that come naturally to you.

4. Use your speaking voice: With "Got three sisters and two dads" and "Hair's pink to piss you off" you can hear them saying it.

5. Experiment with structure. Two three-word sentences. Three two-word sentences. One statement or six separate ones. Repetition can be powerful and punctuation is our friend: "Fat camp makes fat campers fatter"; "Never been drunk. Never been happier."

6. Stop trying so hard. Or "Write carelessly; edit carefully." Throw a million ideas down and then decide. These aren't epic novels or Supreme Court decisions. Just start scribbling and see what catches your eye. In our experience, peoples' first instincts are usually the best. (Brown).

When group members are comfortable and have established goals, they can re-visit this prompt, and perhaps write queer six-word memoirs. The complexity of gender and sexuality make it especially challenging (but revealing and interesting) to answer questions such as "How are you queer?" (courtesy of Mark McBeth) "Describe your gender" and "Who are you attracted to?" in only six-words. The idea is not to reduce these to oversimplified categories, but on one hand to demonstrate the difficulty of boiling

them down, and on the other to explore new genres of queer narrative.

Life Writing and Other Personal Writing

If groups want to engage in memoir and personal writing, each group member can decide the purpose of their own writing. For example, it may be part of a public project or publication to increase the visibility of real stories, or it may be towards more personal ends such as understanding the role of heterosexism in one's own experience, which can have activist benefits and help activists better define their own goals. According to Malinowitz, "Examining one's relationship to heterosexist thought must almost inevitably lead into a questioning of one's epistemological processes, of the way one makes—and can reconsistitute—meaning" (Malinowitz 114). As the next section discusses, it may also work towards a version of intercultural inquiry or C-R. Towards any ends, each member of the group should retain agency in deciding how hir story will be used—it should not be co-opted by others in the group for political or any other purposes.

Addressing Trauma

Chapter 3 discusses the vexed nature of presenting activist writing as therapy, but also addressed the fact that writing can bring forth trauma. Lindsey's suggestion that groups keep a list of therapists on hand, supplementing it can be supplemented by the work of Jenny Horsman. Horsman suggests that community literacy programs build relationships with counselors in the community. Horsman's work is based on interviews with literacy workers about the role of trauma and violence in the work they do in their communities. She found a gap in the knowledge

of literacy workers about trauma and a gap in the knowledge of counselors about literate action, which can often be a form of activism. The relationship in the case of a writing group in an LGBTQQIA center is not the same as the relationships Horsman studied because a community writing group is not necessarily a community literacy program, but the writing might raise some of the same issues for group members. Horsman's suggestions include:

- Hold discussions within the literacy community and between the literacy and counselling providers about possible connections between literacy and therapy.
- Conduct assessments of the availability of appropriate counselling services in the community.
- Develop program capacity to do referrals and provide support to learners working with counsellors.
- Explore collaborative relationships between literacy programs and providers of counselling to make stronger links between education and counselling processes. (14)

In the case of an LGBTQQIA center, some of these relationships may already be in place. Writing group members could contribute to the list with queer-friendly counselors they know and other resources. Groups should be properly equipped to deal with trauma without acting as therapy.

Life Writing

The following life writing prompts are adapted from queer theory and pedagogy. Some are meant to tap into memories that may or may not be meaningful to identity and others are more specific to LGBTQQIA contexts. They start with more general, abstract questions and move to more personal ones. It is worth noting that "[writers'] lived experiences are far more fluid than various identity categories suggest," and that these prompts might only scratch the surface of that.

Life writing Prompts—Questions
- How do people learn gender?
- What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be both or neither?

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- How do you define family?
- What does it mean to be lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer/questioning/intersex/straight/allied? (adapted from Malinowitz)
- What are the factors that serve to create the sexual/gender identity of someone like you? (adapted from Malinowitz)
- How has your sexual identity affected you as a writer? How has your gender affected you as a writer? (adapted from Malinowitz)
- My transformation
- A time someone did not understand me
- A time I felt safe and a time I felt unsafe
- When I came out to someone (coming out narratives are discussed in more depth later in this chapter)
- Who my family is
- How I define myself or how I do not define myself

The following activity, developed by S.L. Wisenberg for the book *Now Write! Nonfiction*, a collection of nonfiction writing exercises edited by Sherry Ellis, is designed to tap into memories and potential topics for life writing. It may help writers tap into memories or ideas they may have considered unimportant but that may serve as rich sites for reflection. It is particularly suited for groups that are still developing trust amongst themselves because it allows writers to access memories in ways that can remain cryptic enough to remain private if that is what they choose. Below, the exercise is represented in excerpts.

"The Brain Map"

"This exercise is a way to pin down . . . stray ideas for essays and other creative nonfictions, and to have them in one identifiable place . . . this exercise basically is an inventory of what's inside your head at the moment" (33). Of the visual element of this activity, Wisenberg says the "shapes" described in the steps are arbitrary but give the paper the appearance of a map. She suggests using colored pencils or markers; I also recommend using a large piece of paper.

Below are the steps of the brain map activity. If groups decide to do step 9, where people exchange maps, make sure everyone is comfortable sharing.

1. Get a piece of unlined paper, typing or larger. Write the date on the top.
2. For five minutes, draw plain circles randomly on the page. Next to each, write the name of a place you know and care about. The places can be large (former Soviet Union) or small (back of the bushes in your childhood home).
3. Now for five minutes, draw circles and color them in. Next to each, write the name of a place you've never been but can imagine. Examples: Paris with Gertrude Stein, Vietnam. If you're a very precise person, you might object that you don't know everything or nothing about a place. If you know a little bit about Vietnam, for example, you could color in the circle just a little bit.

4. For five minutes, draw squares and next to each write a subject you know about and care about. Examples: fly-fishing, Art Deco.
5. For five minutes draw squares and—you guessed it—color them in. Next to each write a subject you don't know much or anything about but think must be interesting. Examples: Cloistered life, footbinding.
6. Take five minutes and draw triangles. Next to each, write the name of someone you know well or know a lot about. Examples: your mother, Stalin.
7. Now, of course, it's time to take five minutes to draw triangle and color them in, writing next to each the name of a person or group you don't know well but think must be interesting. Examples: surfers, maternal great-grandmother.
8. Now you have a piece of paper covered with shapes and writing. If you're working alone, close your eyes and point. Take the subject or name that your finger lands on and write it on top of a clean piece of paper. Start listing: What I know about _____, and what I don't know about _____. Keep going, freewriting, for five minutes.
9. Do this three more times. If you're working with a partner, exchange maps. Person A chooses a topic from B's list and says, "Tell me about _____." Each person does this three times, then each writes for ten minutes.
10. Keep this map. Tape it to the wall near your computer or to the inside cover of your notebook. Refer to it whenever you're stuck. Add to it from time to time. Experiment with weaving together two different, seemingly disparate topics.

Responding to *Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation*.

The contributors to this updated collection edited by Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergman are mostly trans and queer identified, and in short vignettes, essays, comics, and poems, they talk about what queer theory, identity politics, privilege, and terminology have meant to them, among other issues. In the introduction, Bornstein talks about the variety of perspectives represented in the books. "The cool thing is that this book is full of people who disagree on a lot of theory but they all have faith in the cultural power of trannies to make and be change," she says.

The perspectives of the contributors in the book tend to complicate one another. For example, while "never-op, transsexual male crossdresser" Esmé Rodriguez (an identity "that doesn't have a name yet") destabilizes sex and gender categories, arguing that there is enough variation between people to say that sex is not binary (165), Julia Serano, a transwoman, talks about how the deconstruction of identity categories is actually an erasure that serves the privileged. She says, "it's easy to fictionalize an issue when you're not aware of the many ways in which you are privileged by it" (86).

Because of the varied perspectives and modes of storytelling in this book, it can be used by a writing group as a jumping-off point for discussion or for writing (how does your experience compare with this writer's? What arguments do you find most compelling?

Gender Outlaws Next Generation may also provide models for different modes of short storytelling. It is interesting to compare the different approaches the writers take.

Inquiry-based Modifications to Consciousness-Raising

From storytelling, we can move to asking questions about the stories we tell. As detailed in the "goals" section in Chapter 3, the 70s feminist practice of consciousness-raising had many problems, but for many women, it led to meaningful engagement with ways to challenge sexism in their personal lives. Some women's experiences, however, were not validated by their C-R groups. Jay talks about how some C-R leaders tried to construct a single narrative of sexism, patriarchal oppression, and "the female experience." For example, she tells the story of group leaders shutting down a woman who recalls positively her experience of motherhood (52). As a result of this kind of restriction around the way group members told their stories, some C-R groups failed to consider the complexity of women's experiences and at times silenced women whose lives challenged their narrative.

I draw on the community literacy concept of intercultural inquiry, with its focus on dialogue across difference and on making use of difference as a tool for inquiry, to address some of these issues with C-R. As detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, there are notable criticisms of intercultural inquiry, including the focus on finding solutions or answers to complex problems and the idea that a university representative would be the person to facilitate the process of finding a solution within the community. These are notable issues. And although as Jay discusses, C-R groups did not always uphold the practice's theoretical commitment to flattened hierarchies, if writing groups carefully maintained the dynamics created when setting ground rules, some C-R tactics could be a response to the problems with intercultural inquiry.

In the case of both, it is important to recognize that the complexity of LGBTQQIA experience, goals, and priorities, as well as varied material circumstances, do not lend

themselves to a single solution. Queer theory demonstrates this complexity. For that reason, queer pedagogues can help us develop methods for intercultural inquiry.

Because of these similar purposes but different techniques, writing groups interested in this kind of process draw upon the methods of intercultural inquiry and C-R mediated by queer pedagogy, specifically the course design of Harriet Malinowitz in this case. Malinowitz used questions in her gay and lesbian literature class in ways that could facilitate inquiry-based C-R. Of her own queer writing courses, Malinowitz says, "I particularly stressed generating questions . . . the further we moved from expecting absolute answers the wider the conceptual landscape could open up before us" (125). The a goal of this activity is not to find the one root solution to marginalization (a perceived problem with intercultural inquiry) or one root cause of marginalization (a criticism of C-R), but to explore the ways in which experiences of identity, marginalization, and agency are felt differently, and to develop tactics for confronting and interrogating dominant narratives of gender and sexuality.

Malinowitz works from a poststructuralist view that the concept of shared experience oversimplifies how power relationships are constructed, so it is also designed to look at how identity is constructed. In her Gay and Lesbian writing classes, Malinowitz started the semester with an informal essay on "the relationship between sexual identity and students as readers and writers" (153), which I adapted above (in the life writing section) in a way that might work for some community groups. In her class, Malinowitz used this essay as a starting point for a C-R-like inquiry tool in her classroom. "Each student read her essay out loud, and everyone else wrote one question in response. The questions were read to the entire group (the writer was not to answer), and then the slips of paper with questions were passed to the writer . . . to be used when the writer revised the piece" (154). In the classroom, this activity functioned somewhat as

a writing workshop, but in a community writing group, the questions would be designed to closely examine how identities are constructed and how they position us. This approach also lends itself to shared airtime since everyone gets a designated turn to speak. Another activity Malinowitz did in her classroom used similar informal writing assignments, but this approach was designed to foster more direct discussion. Malinowitz talks about how the students in one of her courses wrote political position papers. In a community writing group, this may be determined more like a C-R group would do it—collectively choosing a topic and everyone could write about experiences with that topic or position. In Malinowitz's class, "The nights we discussed [political topics covered in the position papers], we sat in a circle and the students who had written on that topic read their essays out loud, one after the other. The point here was not to workshop the pieces, but to use the series of papers much as one uses a panel at a conference, so that different perspectives would be aired and starting points for discussion could be generated" (154). Writing groups could follow a similar procedure to discuss perspectives on chosen topics.

The following are potential methods for engaging in inquiry surrounding identity, experiences of marginalization, and tactics for responding to marginalization.

Higgins, Long, and Flower talk about concrete strategies for intercultural inquiry. Despite some of the critiques of intercultural inquiry, there are elements of it that can be adapted for community activist writing and with the flattened hierarchies of community C-R. For example, they suggest that community participants develop problem narratives called critical incidents, which "elicit carefully contextualized accounts of how people actually experience problems" (21) and that "supportive readers [or listeners] of these narratives can provide "prompts . . . for the story-behind-the-story" (22). Higgins, Long and Flower say:

> Responding to questions such as *What would a teenager [or transman, or woman, or bisexual person] see going on here that adults [or outsiders] wouldn't? Why did she do*

that? Why did he say that?, reveal the "movies of the mind" she may be using to interpret a complex situation. These prompts ask her to set the stage, script the action, assign the roles. Such questions may seem basic enough, but the explanation writers provide can be surprising and enlightening to outside readers. (22)

The difference for community writing is that the narratives might begin with a different audience in mind. Rather than working to make the narratives "surprising and enlightening to outside readers," as Higgins, Long, and Flower suggest (22), the goal would be more like C-R's, where the group members ask questions to make the narrative more surprising and enlightening to the storyteller and the group.

As Higgins, Long, and Flower point out, stakeholders are often guided by a "hidden logic of often unspoken motives, values, and assumptions," and therefore this kind of discussion may help activists discover for themselves how their experiences function and what kinds of activist projects they may want to take on to respond to these experiences and problems.

Inquiry-Based C-R

Problem narratives

Group members will take turns deciding on topics for this activity. The member will state a topic they are interested in exploring through narrative, perhaps a problem or an aspect of identity (adapted from C-R). Then there is time to write. Anyone who is interested in the topic can write a narrative related to it.

Next the group will act as supportive readers or listeners for one another (adapted from intercultural inquiry) as each group member who would like to share reads their narrative out loud. The person telling her or his story can decide whether they want written questions and comments (adapted from Malinowitz) or a discussion (adapted from intercultural inquiry and C-R). As the person shares, the group members listening comes up with prompts for elaboration (adapted from intercultural inquiry) meant to elicit the context, interpretation, motives, values, and assumptions might influence the story.

Questions might include (this is just a small selection):

- What was happening before this story happened?
- Why do you think it happened the way it did?
- How did it make you feel at the time?
- How does this story make you feel as you look back at it now?
- What would the ideal outcome have been?
- What do you imagine the others involved in the story were feeling or thinking?
- What would you like the others involved in the story to know?
- Is there any way that you would react differently if the incident(s) you described occurred again?

It is important that these questions not be delivered in a way that makes the storyteller feel like her or his interpretation of events has been invalidated. Since many LGBTQQIA narratives are erased, ignored, dismissed and invalidated by master narratives in many contexts, it is important to validate these narratives—the questions are designed to draw out additional details and discussion in order for the storyteller to make decisions about how to approach or frame the problem, not to change her or his interpretation of the events described.

Sometimes, unstructured discussion might be the best approach after each narrative, as described by Malinowitz. This may lead to unexpected intersections and ideas.

This activity can be used to develop activist goals and projects or to develop narratives for public projects, which would be decided by individual writers.

Writing in Alternative Genres

Composition studies has afforded us with rich understandings of how multimodal, or non-text, writing can enrich student understanding of a topic and can challenge our assumptions of what a text is. Kristie S. Fleckenstein, for example, talks about how multimodal writing can be used to counter negative school experiences as she argues that our understanding of literacy is wrapped up in linguistic supremacy, and challenges us to "picture literacy, to disestablish our definitions of literacy as dominantly and aggressively linguistic. We need to seek an alternative imaginary that enables us to conceive of writing-reading as something more than words, more than language" (2). Nancy Mack notes that multi-genre projects "[p]resent multiple, even conflicting perspectives of one event or topic" (qtd. in Langstraat). Though a more in-depth look at how this might be an asset in community writing and for LGBTQQIA writers in particular is outside of the scope of this project, some groups might find it to be a useful tool. These guidelines draw on the work of queer pedagogues DiGrazia and Boucher who talk about their use of multimodal composition of hybrid texts, or texts that span multiple genres, in their queer writing class.

DiGrazia and Boucher talk about their use of visual and hybrid genres in their queer writing course. They say their autobiographical assignments, described below, were "designed to enable students to trace and record their understandings of self, of queer, and of writing" (29). Their first autobiographical assignment, a collage and writing piece, was created in response to the problem that identity is often too complicated to easily describe, especially in a heterosexist society where discussion of non-normative identities is silenced. The visual and hybrid genre were meant to help students "represent configurations of identity that were lived and/or felt but not yet articulated . . . [to] introduce students to the possibility of other forms of presentation" (19). In the course, students complete two other hybrid-genre autobiography projects, also described below, with the aim of understanding identity in ways that only non-text genres might allow writers to access. They say, "We wanted to expand our understanding of writing to one that wasn't solely relegated to words on paper and to examine the ways we write ourselves in visual culture" (30). DiGrazia and Boucher present hybrid texts as a way of queering writing:

> We were challenged by those who reviewed our proposal not only to introduce queer theory and content, but to queer the act of writing. In order to do so, we envisioned complicating traditional divisions and prescriptive literary genres. For example, by recombining genres such as poetry and expository writing, fiction and autobiography and by blurring the lines between public and private writing, we questioned what possibilities for representing selves and cultures would emerge. Our goal was to create the conditions whereby students could articulate realities and use language and perform in ways that represented what, for each student, might be contradictory, inarticulable, or unrepresentable. . . While we think queer texts share many characteristics with certain feminist or other postmodern discourses, for the purpose of our course, we were envisioning texts that were queer as those that questioned fundamental assumptions about identity categories. Furthermore, we saw queer texts as purposefully provocative, edgy, and meant to destabilize the audience's assumptions about what is "normal" about gender, sexual identity, race and/or class categories. (26)

The following activities are meant to facilitate queer projects in multiple genres. Some come from DiGrazia and Boucher's description of their syllabus and others are adapted from other creative writing prompts for multi-genre writing.

For example, one of the projects DiGrazia and Boucher asked their students to do was an autobiographical collage. This is an activity that could be adapted for an LGBTQQIA activist writing group to use, either for their own purposes (articulating stories and goals in new ways) or towards public projects, which is discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

The idea behind DiGrazia and Boucher's assignment was for students to create a visual project "whereby we asked students to think about and represent themselves as writers: 'One who uses words, cultural styles, bodies, social ideology, gesture, acts of resistance, and a variety of other cultural practices and artifacts as a means to write him/her/hirself into everyday life and communicating his/her/hir ideas to others' (First Assignment Sheet)" (29).

Collage

Groups should collect supplies: magazines, photographs, newspapers, scissors, glue, paper and construction paper, images that are striking to them that they can print from online, markers or colored pencils, and so on. To avoid financially supporting Hearst and Condé Nast with visual projects, groups may want to collect magazines they already own, or that friends and family own. They can also get used magazines from second-hand bookstores.

Prompts for collages can be adapted from many of the life writing prompts listed above. There are also prompts specific to visual composition, such as those developed by journaling instructor Kelley Kilmer, whose class is described in a blog by Lynda Heines, and those developed monthly by blogger Jamie Ridler, who advocates the practice of full moon dreamboards, a visual project (drawing, collage, etc) co-inciding with the full moon each month and based on a theme. Below are some collage prompts—writers in the group can go through magazines or other images with the prompt in mind and cut things out that stick out to them as answering the prompt. Then they can arrange what they found into a collage.

Adapted from DiGrazia and Boucher:
-How do you represent yourself as a writer?
-How do you represent your identity?

From Kelley Kilmer (Heines):
-What makes you laugh out loud? (Satire?)
-How do you find peace?
-What/who has influenced you?

Adapted from Ridler's Full Moon Dreamboards:
- What dreams is it time to tend?
- What dreams are emerging? What's stirring?
- What desires lie deep within?
-What are you hungry for?

Collage Prompts meant to challenge heteronormativity:
-Which images that you find are sexist? Heterosexist?
-Which images that you find are heteronormative?
-Which images that you find are otherwise stereotypical or problematic in the way they portray people?

Collage is one method that might be used in a larger hybrid genre writing project, zines. Alison Piepmeier, author of *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Culture* defines zines as, "quirky, individualized booklets filled with diatribes, reworkings of pop culture iconography, and . . . personal and political narratives. They are self-produced and anti-corporate. Their production, philosophy and aesthetic are anti-professional" (2). Focusing on the visual details, Mark Todd and Esther Pearl Watson, authors of zine-making guide Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine call them "photocopied and stapled publications filled with fun anecdotes and comics" and say you can make one about "anything you imagine: favorite bands, movies, subcultures," and so on (4). The independent publishing ethos of zines as a genre make them a good possible fit for a project for some community writing groups.

Third wave feminists, particularly riot grrls[9], have often used zines to articulate political positions. Elizabeth Dutro, Jennifer Sinor, and Sara Rubinow say that the zinesters they interviewed as part of a study "identified with the political left and were often explicit in their feminist agendas, their criticism of homophobia and racism, and their explorations of how

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[9] According to Jessica Rosenburg and Gitana Garofalo, riot grrrl was born in Washington DC and Olympia, Washington in response to a patriarchal culture that was developing in the punk scene as it became more commercialized. Bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile were central in the movement, and through their music and zines, riot grrrl got bigger. Rosenburg and Garofalo describe it as, "much angrier than . . . the second wave of feminism of the 1970s," and riot grrrls often used tactics like guerilla theater, vandalism of sexist billboards and images, and zine-making and distribution at punk concerts and in independent bookstores.

gender operates in their lives," (132). Additionally, Piepmeier says, "[girl] zines are sites for articulation of a vernacular third wave feminist theory" and that they offer "idiosyncratic, surprising, yet savvy and complex responses to late-twentieth-century incarnations of sexism, racism, and homophobia." LGBTQQIA writing groups could use zines to circulate a similarly vernacular and anti-corporate version of queer theory.

Zines can provide a great way for writers to engage in appropriation of negative cultural messages. According to scholar Tobi Jacobi in a forthcoming essay on zine-making, riot grrls often used visual means (including zines) to engage in appropriation. She says:

> Riot grrrl became a force of critique and creation—making space for an organic empowerment to emerge through the appropriation of products, media, and language intended to regulate female behavior in repressive ways (e.g., redirecting the message of a women's billboard ad through graffiti). (211)

This kind of visual appropriation art was occurring in zines, too, on multiple levels, and can challenge heterosexist messages as well as sexist ones. Since magazines often contain messages and images that are negative, sexist, and heteronormative, zinesters can cut them apart and re-arrange them, draw over them, or otherwise change the messages. For example, someone might cut out as many images of heterosexual couples as they can find, then cut them apart and "queer" them, placing them in same-gender or other pairings, drawing over them to complicate their gender expression, and so on. When I did this as a page for a zine, it provided a visual demonstration of how heteronormative magazines can be: even an illustration of gingerbread cookies was organized in a heterosexual pairing—one of them had eyelashes and a bow. I paired the gingerbread-"man" with a human man and I gave the gingerbread-"woman" a skateboard. Zines also give writers an opportunity to appropriate magazines as a genre, challenging their purpose and the types of writing they contain.

It is also the production and distribution of zines that gives them activist potential. As mentioned early, they are an example of independent publishing, anti-corporate and anti-advertising, and distributed at places like rallies, concerts, and independent bookstores. Riot grrrl zines like *Jigsaw* were distributed at punk concerts and rallies, and, according to Piepmeier recipients could "shove the booklet into their pockets and take it home to read about it means to have a revolution . . . by and for girls" (2). Zines could be a tool for activists in many movements to circulate ideas in similar ways.

DiGrazia and Boucher talk about the specific advantages for queer-activst writers to make zines. They say that as a project in their class, they asked students to "somehow perform their identity through visual and aural mediums," and one student chose a zine (30). They describe it as a challenging, meaningful text:

> In defining his project, he states, "I'm not sure exactly what I have produced: a quasi-autobiographical account of me, something that begins to articulate my queerness, my struggles with such, and how I am searching for conclusion. A mix of memory, dialogue, narrative and rant, this is the closest I have come to articulating myself through text." The zine was multivoiced, a mixture of autobiography, photography, poetry, dialogue, a way to represent different, fragmented pieces of himself. Fragments of sentences, fragments of photos of himself capture, through pieces, what somehow cannot be represented as whole. (DiGrazia and Boucher 30)

Collaborative Zines

Writing groups would gather similar materials they gathered for collages, as collage can be part of zine-making. They may also want to gather additional art supplies so the pages can integrate multiple forms of art and writing. The group can decide whether they want their zine to be made up of full pages or half-pages and have paper available in the size they choose.

Groups can either decide on a theme for a zine, based on self-representation-type themes (DiGrazia and Boucher) or social and activist themes. Alternatively, groups can decide that each page might have its own theme. These decisions are likely to vary based on whether the group wants the zine to be an activist project for community publication or a more personal project designed to facilitate articulation of goals and of self. For more discussion on public activist projects, see "public projects" below.

Each group member can create as many pages as she or he wants, combining collage, drawing, poetry or autobiographical writing, interviews, or whatever else they would like to answer the guiding prompt or theme the group has determined. It may be helpful to look at examples of zines as a model—often they can be found at independent bookstores or at coffee shops.

Depending on what the group has access to, the zine pages can be put together into a publication using a photocopier, or a scanner and software like InDesign or Microsoft Publisher. Digital flash copies can be made using free tools online like flipsnack. Together, the groups can make decisions about distribution and audience. They can take hard copies of the zine to places like LGBT bookstores, leave them in the community center for outreach, drop them off at coffee shops or on campuses, and so on.

Collage and zine-making are particular interests of mine, which is why I focus on them here, but based on DiGrazia and Boucher's discussion of queer texts, community writing groups would find other alternate-genre texts enriching projects as well. The conclusion offers suggestions for further research on the queer potential for comic-writing, digital storytelling and oral histories, and video game creation and other genres.

Much of the appeal of these genres is that they disrupt cultural master-images and master-narratives—disruptive writing, or writing that engages in gender-trouble, can take many forms.

Writing to Disrupt Heteronormativity

Writing that disrupts heteronormativity and constructed gender roles is one way to respond to Butler's call to engage in gender trouble. Based on queer pedagogy, creative writing prompts, and a few other books that ask readers to examine the meaning of gender, this section of the chapter contains writing exercises that can help groups engage in writing that calls attention to heteronormative assumptions and that helps readers and writers interrogate those assumptions. Malinowitz talks about the effect of queer writing on readers. She says in reading queer texts, "everyone would have to consider what it would mean to read the world from a queer interpretive stance . . . everyone would have to problematize the seemingly generic concept of heterosexuality" (Malinowitz 114). Further, in a hypertext for *Meat Journal*, William Banks notes that challenging heteronormative discourse can be a form of queer writing in and of itself, stating, "one method for having students write queerly, or perhaps become queer(ed)

writers, in order to expose heterosexist discourses and the privileges connected to normative

sexualities" (Banks, "Queerjacketing"). This is an important goal for queer activist texts with

outside audiences because, as with privilege, cultural discourse that normalizes only the

dominant subjectivity can be invisible to people in the dominant subject position.

One way Malinowitz suggests creating queer texts is to examine heterosexual discourse

in order to decenter it. If heteronormativity is not interrogated, heterosexuality is a concept that is

considered unmarked and default. Calling it into question opens up new ways to analyze how

identity is constructed:

> [H]eterosexuality [is] a generally unremarked-upon, unanalyzed identity, [and
> homosexuality has] no meaning or existence apart from its binary complement; it [is] the
> confluence of our identities as subject matter that [will] help us understand sexual
> identity as a social phenomenon in more profound ways. (Malinowitz 129)

Malinowitz is saying here that the binary construction of sexuality has to be examined from

multiple angles in order to challenge it. Like the question Sedgwick raises about why gender of

object choice is the determining factor for "sexual identity," the idea is that people tend to think

of this binary system as natural or obvious or as a given when it is not. Writing gives activists an

opportunity to demonstrate this disconnect and encourage writers readers to question what they

assume is normal about gender and sexuality.

As an example of this, Malinowitz talks about how though there is a history of queer

identities of authors and characters being erased by teachers and by history (characters are "de-

gayed"), queer pedagogues and writers can interpret characters and situations as queer

("characters . .. can also be 'gayed'"). She talks about how this could happen through a reader's

interaction with the text. She says, "This [practice] . . . [makes] explicit the ways that the realm

of the 'possible' [can] be enlarged; human variety encompassed" (122). This concept, along with

Sedgwick's question about why "sexual orientation" is defined the way it is, are the jumping-off points for the next two sets of exercises.

Queering Stories and Characters

Have each member of the group think of a story they know—a childhood fairy tale, a film, a book—and ask themselves how the story could be queered. Could the characters be part of the LGBTQQIA community? How could the storyline be made less heteronormative (is an opposite-sex romance a major part of the plot? Are the characters stereotypically gendered?)? How could the characters trouble gender? Re-write the story as a queer story—the differences could be obvious or subtle, and the stories may be humorous or serious.

These stories could be used in public projects (such as zines) to prompt audiences to re-think the assumptions and heteronormativity built into many cultural narratives. They can also be used to help the group re-think their preconceptions.

Imagining different definitions of sexual orientation

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asks why our concept of "sexual orientation" is based only on gender of object choice and not "the very many dimensions along which the genital activity of one person can be differentiated from another (dimensions that include preference for certain acts, certain zones or sensations, certain physical types, a certain frequency, certain symbolic investments, certain relations of age or power, a certain species, a certain number of participants, etc.etc. etc.) (8). This observation might lend us to humorous or satirical narratives where we imagine sexual orientation as attached to something other than gender of object choice.

Groups might write a narrative about what our culture would look like if it defined "sexual orientation" by one of the other factors Sedgwick mentions or by other divisions that might come across as absurd. So, for example, write a story that takes place in a world where attraction to people your own age only is considered the sexual norm, and a young man who is attracted to men and women who are a decade or two older is "in the closet." He knows he may be ostracized by his family if he comes out as attracted to older partners. Or a story in a culture where groups of three were considered the primary sexual and family arrangement, and couples of two are not allowed to adopt children or keep children they have.

Of course, for many people, attraction to a sex or gender expression is much more fixed than and personally important than for example, the age of the person they are attracted to, a factor in attraction that might be more fluid. The intention of the exercise is not to draw false comparisons, but to make an audience think more critically about heterosexism by making them reconsider binary understandings of sexuality.

Activities used in general writing groups may provide queer activist writers with surprising opportunities to queer other texts or call attention to their heteronormativity. Newspaper blackout poetry is a collaborative poetry project by writer and artist Austin Kleon. His book, *Newspaper Blackout*, contains his collections of poems made by "redacting

newspapers with a permanent marker" and a how-to section with instructions on newspaper

blackout poetry (see fig. 1). This technique, though not connected by the author to queer writing,

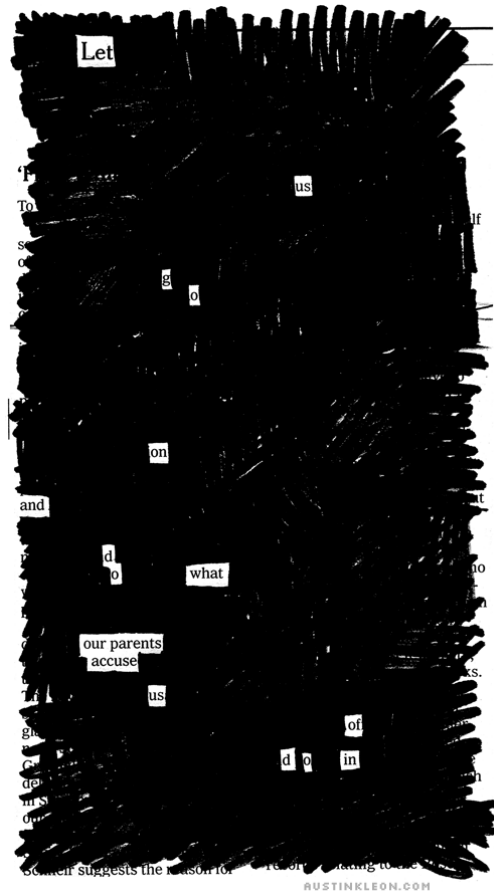has potential to be used to create queer texts.

Figure 1 Austin Kleon, Newspaper Blackout Poems; Let Us Go On, Austin Kleon, 11 Nov 2011, Web, 22 April 2012

Queer Newspaper Blackout

The general directions for newspaper blackout are:

"Grab a newspaper
Grab a marker
Find an article
Cross out words, leaving behind the ones you like
Pretty soon you'll have a poem."

This can be used for several queer projects. Like the concept above of queering stories, blackout can be
used to queer articles, or to appropriate an article to tell a queer narrative. To do so, writers may want to

select newspaper or magazine articles dealing with gender and sexuality.

Though the result is different than blackout poetry, the blackout method can also be used to visually demonstrate the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in media such as magazines. Writers could pull articles from magazines like collected for a collage or zine project and cross out every sentence that contains some kind of heteronormative assumption, gender assumption, or stereotype. This will show in a striking visual way how much of a typical magazine is based on heteronormative assumptions.

Parodying the Coming Out Narrative

Parodying the coming out narrative as a genre is another way to subvert stereotypical and sometimes pathologizing expectations audiences may hold. While in many LGBTQQIA people's lives, the concept of coming out is complicated. Diana Fuss says, "most of us are both inside and outside at the same time," (Fuss). In his article on embodied writing, Banks talks about being out as a highly situated, constantly renegotiated position, based on audience and context. He describes how he thinks about the decision to be out with some writing and teaching groups and not with others, explaining:

> As a returning member of the National Writing Project, each summer I have to decide over and over again whether or not to be "out" to the (mostly female) fellows who have come to join [the project]. Despite the fact that I'm almost always comfortable being out around women, . . . I'm always worried about whether or not these particular women will be so open and accepting. (29)

In addition to coming out as a constantly negotiated space, Malinowitz describes it as "discursive" when she outlines various psychological and theoretical perspectives. "Coming out remains an unhonored, unblessed, and confusingly unstructured passage in mainstream culture," she says (36). Despite the real-life challenges surrounding being out, mass media portrayals, which are likely to shape some level of cultural understanding about coming out, are somewhat monolithic.

"The coming out experience has become the most recognizable queer narrative in current popular culture, specifically by our generation, as the experience has been portrayed by

television, film, and mass media," says Alex Bedder for *NYULocal*. TVTropes.com describes the coming out narrative as "*The* LGBT story trope. Used at least once for almost every LGBT character ever." While it does increase LGBTQQIA visibility in the media, this framing of the coming out narrative as the quintessential queer narrative is problematic.

Butler (1991), Fuss (1991), and Sedgwick (1990) criticize in/out of the closet as a false and limiting binary. Sedgwick talks about this binary as part of the ways in which binary understandings of sexuality have shaped western thinking about concepts such as public/private and majority/minority (71). As long as this binary is unchallenged, we fail to complicate the simplistic understanding of outness and visibility as the only needed answer to heteronormativity. As an example, Sedgwick talks about a 1986 article in *The New York Native* urging gay people to come out of the closet. "You must come out, for your own sake and for the sake of all of us . . . If every gay person came out to his or her family, a hundred million Americans could be brought to our side" (qtd. In Sedgwick 71). Twenty-five years later, this concept of coming out as the ultimate LGBTQQIA experience is still present in mass media.

In an article for the *Huffington Post* titled, "Teens Coming Out on TV Is Important, but Can Be Problematic," Trish Bendix analyzes the depiction of teenagers coming out on *Ugly Betty*, *90210*, *Glee*, and other TV shows. She notes that most of these characters came out to enthusiastically accepting friends and family. While, as she says, this "may be a sign of the times or just the fact that TV writers are wising up to the idea that sad coming out stories ending in disgruntled parents and homophobic slurs are tired and yawn-inducing," and is positive in that it moves away from the pathologizing, negative narrative of shame and scorn, the trope of the coming-out narrative as the solution to all of the character's problems is a limiting trope as well, in that it falls into the same binary as the article from *The New York Native* quoted by Sedgwick.

Taken to its extreme, the trope of coming-out-as-resolution can lead to erasure—once the gay character has come out, the writers don't know what to do with her or him anymore. TV Tropes points to "The standard American Soap Opera approach," which is "to phase the gay character out shortly after the Coming Out Story has played out." They cite Lucas Jones from *General Hospital* as one example.

Since the coming out narrative is so often structured using tired tropes that do not promote much critical thinking, Bendix questions the usefulness of the genre. She says:

> [I]t's arguable if we need to see these "coming out" moments at all. We knew Kurt, Marshall and Justin were gay, but is it imperative that their storylines begin before they say it to the people around them? Will we evolve to the point where there can be gay teens existing in entertainment without them having to come forward and there be a focus on their struggle to say or act on it?

While the approach Bendix recommends would be refreshing to see more in the media, the tropes that seem to be constant in coming out narratives are also useful for disruptions and troubling, much as queer pedagogue William Banks has done in his classes. In a 2003 article for College English and a 2005/2006 hypertext for *Meatjournal*, Banks discusses a writing assignment he has facilitated in a Gender in the Humanities class and a Queer Rhetorics class. This assignment, a version of a coming out narrative (see fig. 2), can be adapted for activist use in a community writing group setting.
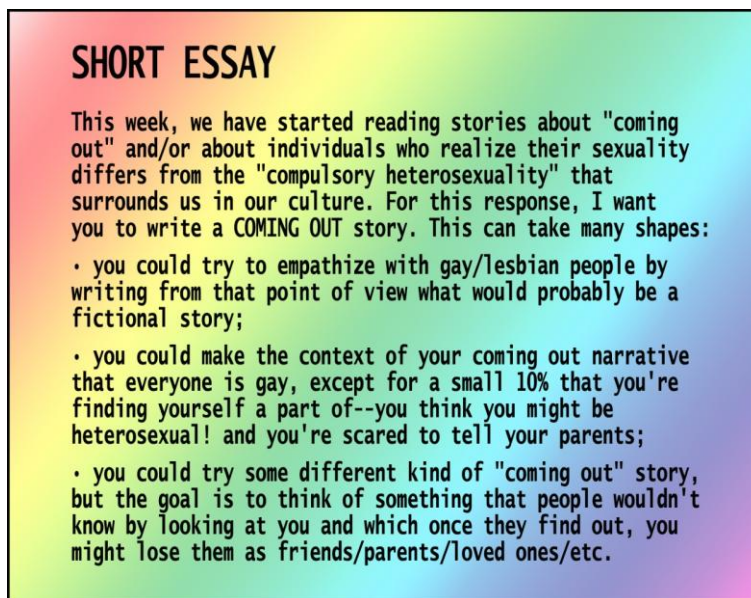
Figure 2 William Banks, The Values of QueerJacketing: What Happens When Student Writers Go Gay?, MeatJournal, 1.2, 2005-2006, n.p., Web, 22 April 2012.

Banks asks students to "look at the different tropes. . . in relation to the act of 'coming out'" and use them in one of the narrative prompts (Banks, "Written through" 36). "So many published "coming out" narratives tend to assume an essentialism that this assignment seeks to disrupt," Banks says (Banks, "QueerJacketing"). The third prompt, a "different kind of 'coming out' story," is an example of how queer pedagogy can take on new meaning outside of the classroom: while inside the classroom it is presented as a last resort option for students who are too uncomfortable to perform LGBTQQIA identities through their writing, in the community, where writing group members are part of the LGBTQQIA community, the third narrative prompt becomes an opportunity to "expose heterosexist discourses and the privileges connected to normative sexualities" (Banks, "QueerJacketing")

A student who used the third approach in Banks' class, for example, wrote about coming out as a gymnast in a town where soccer is "a religion" (Banks, "Writing through" 33). Though the narrative is humorous, it demonstrates the absurdity of being expected to live in fear and shame based on one aspect of one's identity and to overcome it by confessing. The exercise is

not meant to create false equivalencies as much as it is meant to call into question the tropes and function of the coming out narrative.

While one of Banks' intentions for this narrative is to foster empathy, which it is likely to do with some audiences, it may also help audiences question the cultural binary between private and public information. It also demonstrates how the stereotypical coming out narrative tends to reduce a person down to one facet of their identity. Banks' reflection on the effects on his students of this narrative exercise demonstrates its usefulness for activists within a writing group, saying, "the students had done something in their narratives that they'd probably not consciously done before. As a reader and teacher, I was drawn into these narratives, particularly to the fissures that were created by such texts, ruptures in which students' 'selves' were utterly fragmented" (Banks, "QueerJacketing"). This exercise, then, facilitates exploration of how identity is constructed, reflection that might be useful for activists. Further, because it calls into question the binary understanding of in the closet/out of the closet, it helps readers re-think their preconceived notions of sexuality, this narrative could also be helpful in public projects for various audiences.

Disrupting the Coming Out Narrative

Either using or inverting tropes present in coming out narratives, write a "coming out" narrative about some other aspect of your life or identity. It could be large or it could be incidental, and in this case, the more strange or absurd the example, the better. Try to think of something that people wouldn't know by looking at you. Here are some questions to consider addressing in your coming out narrative:

-Do you have to hide this aspect of your identity?
-What consequences do you fear should you be found out?
-How would your family, friends, and colleagues react to your coming out?
-What happens after you are out of the closet?

Another way to subvert the expectations of the reader of a coming out narrative might be to write the reactions of friends and family to your protagonist's "coming out" as strange or nonsensical. Try to think of other ways to make your audience question the in the closet/out of the closet binary.

Questioning deeply held conceptions about gender and sexuality is a helpful exercise for activists themselves as well as for the communities they are working to reach. Questioning can help activists think critically about their goals and approach. For this reason, the exercises meant to encourage questioning, including the ones below, can be helpful for public projects as well as writing projects kept within the activist writing group.

My Gender Workbook Exercises

Kate Bornstein's *My Gender Workbook* (subtitled *how to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely*) is a book filled with questionnaires, writing exercises, puzzles and quizzes as well as the humorous, accessible commentary of *Gender Outlaws* editor Kate Bornstein. Bornstein presents the book as "a workbook about questioning [gender socialization and stereotypes]." Writing groups may find many aspects of this book useful, but this section highlights just a few of the writing exercises Bornstein includes in the book.

Though the audience for the book is mostly people who are not already familiar with discourses around gender like group members may already be, Bornstein does address the more knowledgeable members of her audience, saying, "this stuff [questioning gender] must seem like kid's play for you. Either that or water in the desert, huh? Have fun reading the book any ol' way you want to. It's going to make you feel a lot less alone in the world" (17).

Because of this, group members may consider that the writing that comes from these exercises might be useful in a number of ways. As a group, it may give them common terms/experiences to talk about gender identity or open up dialogue around goals connected to gender identity. They also may choose to use the writing from these exercises as part of an

activist public project or include the prompts in a public project for their community audience to engage with. Though many of the writing exercises from this book might fit in other sections of this curriculum, it is in the disruptions section because Bornstein designed the book and exercises so her readers could begin to engage in gender trouble.

The following exercise allows activists to move from thinking of their own experiences as gendered in one narrative to thinking of these experiences as transgressing gender in the next. When we see the "friend" in the second narrative questioning gender for the same reasons we do, we begin to think of how we could read our experiences as transgressing gender. It also allows you to test how open you are to changes in your own gender identity.

Exercise: Has there ever been a time in your life that you haven't been treated like a real man or a real woman? If so, did you give yourself any negative messages about that? If you did, write them down here.

Now, what if a dear friend of yours were to come to your house. Ze sits down and tells you that ze is exploring hir gender identity with the idea of maybe changing genders, but ze tells you ze has reservations about doing it. Ze lists out all the reasons in the [narrative you just wrote]. How would you counsel your dear friend?

Was there any difference between the way you counsel yourself and the way you would counsel your dear friend? Think you could ever treat yourself the way you treat a friend? (Bornstein 11-12)

This second exercise is useful for activists because it is helpful in coming up with additional questions about how gender and gender identity function in society, which may help activists refine their goals.

The Ten-Minute Gender Outlaw Exercise

Here's a simple, basic exercise to begin poking around in gender. It's one you can do once a day. It doesn't have to take a long time. Take one or more of these three questions a day, and write down a series of answers.

> What is a man?
> What is a woman?
> Why do we have to be one or the other?

The trick is that the answers have to be phrased as questions. ::grin:: Yeah, I know . . . kinda like the television game-show Jeopardy that way, but it works. It keeps the questions open, which is where I think they belong. It doesn't matter what *track* those further questions take, just as long as more questions come out of it, until the question itself is enough for you and you don't need to write anymore.

So, one day it might look like this:

> What is a man?
> What is a woman, for that matter?
> What's a boy?
> Was I ever a boy?
> What was it like to be treated like a boy?
> Did I like it?
> What did I like about it?
> How do I like to be treated today?
> Does that make me a boy, still?

Or the next day, it might look like this:

> What is a woman?
> Why am I even bothering to ask that?
> Doesn't everyone know what a woman is?
> Who the hell is everyone anyway?
> What business of theirs is it to tell me what a woman is?

Another day, it might look like this:

> Why do we have to be one or the other?
> What other choices are there?

Or you may go on for pages and pages. The point is to get the question you want to think about some more, one that really tickles your brain—something you can ponder on for the balance of the day. Once you get to *that* question, you stop. That's all there is to it. (Bornstein 32-33)

Bornstein developed the following set of exercises to help writers determine how they learned gender. This can serve as a starting point for writers to write narratives about these experiences for personal use or for public projects, can help them discover how they learned gendered behaviors which can allow them to work on eliminating the ones they don't like or want, and can help writers or others who read their work be aware of how they are possibly limiting the children in their lives by teaching them restrictive messages about gender.

Exercise: Write down up to five gender-specific behaviors you were *actively taught* by people who raised you as a child

Teacher   Behavior(s) they actively taught

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now write down some of the gender-specific behaviors you're aware of that are or were displayed by the people who raised you as a child.

Teacher   Behavior(s) they displayed

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Do you notice any of those behaviors in your own life today?

Did any of the gendered behaviors you were taught conflict with the gendered behaviors you watched your teachers display? (Bornstein 142-143)

Exercise:

1. Can you recall times when as a child you experimented with some new form of behavior, only to be told or to somehow discover that this behavior was not appropriate for your assigned gender? List up to five of those times.

2. Can you remember one or more times when you as a child learned a specific gender behavior from an adult family member? List up to five of those times here.

3. Now rate each of these learning experiences on a scale from one to five where five would be the best of all possible ways to learn something—gentle, respectful, and rewarding—and one would be a very painful or embarrassing way to learn something. (Bornstein 143)

Developing and Implementing Public Projects

Many of the exercises in this chapter are outwardly-focused activist projects with the intent that each group and each writer will determine their ideal audiences for these projects. Though many of them will be useful for activists if their writing never leaves the groups—some of the Gender Workbook exercises, for example, or the C-R inquiry exercises—others—such as hybrid-genre zines and collages, disruptive narratives that would make audiences reconsider their understandings of sexuality and identity categories—may have greater social impact as parts of public projects circulated online or in the community. Most community members are probably less likely to have questioned heteronormativity than members of an activist LGBTQQIA writing group, and introducing subversive ideas to them take the projects beyond the realm of "preaching to the choir."

However, there are considerations that groups need to take when implementing public projects. First, they must respect the community guidelines and confidentiality rules established by the group. All group members should retain the right to decide whether any of their writing or ideas are released publically; no one's work should be included in such a project without his or her consent. In the context of C-R, Jay speaks against using someone's personal experience for political analysis when they are not comfortable with it (62). In the same way, using someone's personal narrative or work in a public project without their consent is an example of misappropriation. This misappropriation can happen inside of the writing group as well as outside of it.

Activist writing groups should be aware that when stories leave the "safe space" of the workshop and enter the public domain, they should be careful about co-option, particularly when it comes to personal narrative—it can become possible for others may use narratives or projects

for their own purposes or their own gain. For example, if the group makes a zine and gives

copies to an independent bookstore, then the bookstore could co-opt the work by selling the zines

for profit. James Berlin warns, "expressionistic rhetoric is easily co-opted by the very capitalist

forces it opposes" (487). Sometimes co-option is more subtle than this, however, and appears to

be in the spirit of the activist project. One very notable example is the co-option of the It Gets

Better project by politicians and other celebrities. As explained in Chapter 3, It Gets Better is a

project that collects videos of LGBT adults talking about their experiences being bullied or

shamed as teenagers and about how their lives have improved since. The stated goal of the

project is to give hope to LGBT teenagers. In his presentation at the 2012 Conference on College

Composition and Communication, Keith Walters rhetorically analyzed the project. He notes that:

> [M]any who post make clear they are allies, not members of, the community. We find
> videos from political figures, . . . political organizations; religious leaders and religious
> organizations; entertainers . . . and employers, especially high tech companies.

Due to the capitalist cultural content of the project, he argues:

> [W]hatever message the politicians offer, an ancillary message is "We're on your side;
> vote for us or our party." For the entertainers, the ancillary message is "Buy our product."
> For universities, it is "We get diversity—aspire to attend our school," and for employers,
> it is similar: "aspire to work for us."

This is an example of the audience and intention of a project being potentially misappropriated;

these groups take advantage of the attention and potentially the sympathies of the audience for

their own purposes. Though for many, It Gets Better continues to serve its stated purpose,[10] the

co-option of the project creates the risk of watering down the real intent of the project. Activist

writing groups should take this factor into account when creating public projects, asking

themselves who might misappropriate their work and why, and whether this misappropriation

would alter the efficacy of the public project.

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[10] Though critics have asked questions like: what are you doing to make it better? And how much does this project
really focus on transgender youth?

It is important to note, however, that public and private, while often constructed as a binary, are really not one—Sedgwick links this to the same problematic binary of out of the closet/in the closet. Even if activist writing groups or some members of the groups elect not to participate in public projects, even just sharing their work with one another allows for the circulation of activist ideas and heteronormativity-subverting questions to flow among them, thus impacting each member's activist work and how they interact with the world around them. In this way, even projects kept "private" might influence others outside of the group.

Even with those concerns, activist writing projects shared with the community have great potential to be transformative. My hope is that campus hallways be lined with guerilla-art queer activist collages, bookstores have a shelf of queer activist zines, and coffee shop open mic nights get an earful of radical queer narrative. These projects are about more than visibility; they're about asking the readers/listeners/viewers to question their understanding of gender and sexual identities and perhaps engage in some gender trouble themselves.

Conclusion

Based on the the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, Chapter 5 contains a sample curriculum Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Ally (LGBTQQIA) activist writing groups. The curriculum suggests some ways that queer pedagogy can be translated into new activist potential in community-based writing groups by drawing from writing on queer pedagogy and community literacy. Drawing on these sources, it connects specific writing exercises to various activist goals. Each set of exercises is framed by a discussion of the activity's purpose and limitations. The writing curriculum can be adapted to the needs and goals of specific LGBTQQIA writing groups.

Findings

In speaking with activists and synthesizing pedagogical and activist texts, I found that this synthesis did lend itself to creating guidelines for LGBTQQIA community writing groups to work towards activist ends. Writing groups are one potential activist method towards goals such as disrupting heteronormativity, consciousness-raising as inquiry, and narrative writing either for personal reasons or towards public projects.

There are limitations to writing-as-activism. As discussed in Chapter 3, if writing is used as therapy and turns focus inwards, for example, it may detract from collective action. Further, some may see writing as having less direct impact than some other kinds of activist work such as organizing a rally or canvassing. However, I see writing and writing groups as only part of activist practice, and perhaps leading to direct action. Further, writing gives activists a way to solidify goals and better develop plans, likely leading to more effective activist work overall.

While I established that there are material limitations to implementing queer pedagogy as community writing, such as lack of time and funding, potentially negative school experiences, and so on, and those limitations must be accounted for in planning community writing, I argue that the community offers unique ways to apply queer-pedagogy-as-activism in ways that are limited in the classroom. In the classroom, the institutional expectations of the school, where activism and sexuality may be taboo, limit action. Further, the power imbalance between teacher and students troubles activist potential. In the community, however, more flattened hierarchies and different types of institutional expectations (those of a nonprofit vs those of a university) give community writing groups a surprising edge as a setting for transformative queer writing. Rather than being notably limited by materiality, queer pedagogy takes on new activist potential in the community.

Limitations of my Research

My approach also has notable limitations, some of which are institutional. Dana noted that few LGBTQQIA centers are actually that—they are LGBT centers, or Gay and Lesbian community centers, which focus on resources for these particular groups. The activist writing group who wants to involve a multiplicity of goals and perspectives might have difficulty reaching out to groups that have been marginalized by community centers. Further, as Erika pointed out, LGBTQQIA centers sometimes have therapeutic goals rather than activist ones. Along those lines, in Chapter 3 I talked about how therapeutic goals can sometimes conflict with activist ones, as therapy is about individuals looking inward rather than the collective action of activism.

Even more limiting, since LGBTQQIA community centers are nonprofit organizations, some of them may not be able to sponsor outwardly activist activities. Depending on their IRS nonprofit classification (many are subtypes of 501 (c)(3) organizations), some are restricted from taking part in particular types of activism.

The restriction on nonprofits' participation in collective activism is unsurprising if viewed through the lens of the work of Paul Kivel, who argues that nonprofit agencies are part of the buffer zone between the ruling class and the working classes. Kivel refers to the 1% of the population that controls a large percentage of the world's wealth as the ruling class, and argues:

> People in the ruling class have always avoided dealing directly with people on the bottom of the pyramid and they have always wanted to keep people from the bottom of the pyramid from organizing for power so that they could maintain the power, control, and most importantly, wealth that they have accumulated. They have created a network of occupations, careers, and professions to mediate for and buffer them from the rest of the population. (4)

Kivel characterizes nonprofit agencies, particularly those designed to provide social services. This would include LGBTQQIA community centers. According to Kivel, nonprofits function to co-opt social change and:

> To create professions drawn from the groups of people demanding change of the system, creating an atmosphere of "progress," where hope is kindled, and needs for change are made legitimate, without producing the systematic change which would actually eliminate the injustice or inequality which caused the organizing in the first place. This process separates people in leadership from their communities by offering them jobs providing services to their communities and steering their interests towards the governmental and non-profit bureaucracies that employ them. (6)

To work past this problem, Kivel recommends collective community action. If I had been aware of these limitations on LGBTQQIA centers, I might have designed the writing groups with other community settings, such as LGBT bookstores which have often hosted reading groups, in mind.

That said, any setting has its own set of institutional constraints: while LGBT bookstores may not have some of the limitations that nonprofit organizations often run into, they are less likely to have access to resources like counselors that LGBTQQIA centers have (though they often do have strong community partnerships). Further, a 2012 feature article on LGBT news website *Queerty* reports that LGBT bookstores are experiencing financial difficulty as people turn to online retailers for books and are not as able to offer the community support they once did (Raymundo). A study of the potential of LGBTQQIA writing groups in any setting would have to account for the material and institutional constraints of that setting.

Another limitation of my research is its scope. I was fortunate to interview two experienced, thoughtful activists who voiced great ideas about how writing groups might operate as activist tools. However, both interviewees are part of an LGBTQQIA writing group and are therefore amenable to the idea. It would be helpful to interview activists with no experience with writing groups to give me their impressions and voice concerns. My hope is that future researchers do both interviews with a larger number of activists and with those who have and who have not participated in community writing groups.

Revisiting my Position

As a queer activist and an ally, it is important for me to understand how these two positions complicate and reconstitute one another. My position is rhetorically situated, changing

with context, and it is necessary for me to always reevaluate my identity, my position, and my actions. Catherine Fox reminds me that:

> We must resist the notion that claiming an ally identity is a place of arrival rather than a process. . . . allies-in-process must surrender to the (un)knowable, an act demonstrating respect for others rather than being a mere nod toward "differences" experienced by differently positioned subjects. This act of surrender moves us away from the comforts of social safety secured through inclusive notions of colorblindness, whitewashing, and "straight-washing." We need to decolonize our imagination of this binary logic and seek ways of conceiving spaces and ally relationships that are mobile and fluid. (507)

As I move forward with queer activism and ally work, I must always consider my work and my knowledge to be in-process and open to change.

Standpoint theory says that groups who have experienced marginalization have gained situated knowledge from the need to pass in dominant culture by understanding views that are not their own (Wood 58). Due to the complicated nature of power relations (intersections of identities and discourses, varied experiences), standpoints are partial. One way that mine is limited is my straight and cisgender privilege, which is likely to have limited my work in ways I am not aware of. My hope is that if I made mistakes, that the mistakes do more good—opening up dialogue—than harm.

This research has reenergized me as an activist, and as an advocate for and participant in community writing. This work has motivated me to work towards queering my own writing, using it to interrogate heteronormativity and flip expectations, and to work towards queering the pedagogy I enact in the classroom and in the community.

Suggestions for Future Research

My suggestions for further research include looking to the practices of bookstores and bookstore reading groups to adapt the guidelines for that setting. It would be interesting to see

whether existing book clubs fit into frameworks of queer pedagogy, and bookstores may be able to engage in more overt activism than community centers can and therefore might be a better home base for LGBTQQIA activist writing groups. It would also be worthwhile to seek methods of outreach that do not bound the groups to an institution—the break from an institution would likely mean that groups trade institutional constraints for material ones, but depending on the goals of the group, that could be a worthwhile tradeoff.

Groups interested in multimodal composition, on the other hand, may want to maintain some ties to community centers that may or may not be able to fund these projects. I only scratched the surface on the potential of queering genres for queer activism. Multimodal writing has greatly enriched the work of compositionists. Takayoshi and Selfe note that multimodal composition, which they define as texts that incorporate words, image, videos, and sound, is a method towards progressive, student-centered education. They quote Mary Hocks, who says using experimental (multimodal) forms, students are able to engage with each other and with the world (5-6). Multimodal composition, then, seems to fit well with the concept of queering a text, which is often about making readers question category boundaries. Queer pedagogues like DiGrazia and Boucher have experiemented with queering genres in the classroom to tremendous results as discussed in Chapter 2. Activist community writing groups might be able to use projects like zines, documentary, digital storytelling, oral histories, and dramatization as public projects towards radical ends, and these texts can challenge audiences in unexpected ways.

Another growing area of research that could productively complicate this work is emotion studies, which I have not discussed. Affect theory might offer interesting ways to discuss the tension between activism and pain, which I began to unpack as I looked at the role of therapy in and therapeutic writing as it interacted with activist methods. The work of Ann

Cvetkovich and the work of Lauren Berlant in *the Female Complaint* would provide interesting perspectives from which to view my thesis. Berlant looks at the role of affect in the co-option of narratives, something I have explored the political dynamic of in this thesis. Using examples from women's literature, Berlant describes what she calls "women's culture," marked by expectations about disclosure and intimacy, assertions of commonalities (including appropriation of other women's pain despite marked difference), and uncertainty about feminism and politics. Personal narratives play a role in this women's culture in that they become commodified as common texts that speak to shared experience even if the experiences they divulge are not actually shared. Cvetkovich's work on lesbian archives of trauma suggests that trauma can have activist purpose. She complicates pathologizing or therapeutic understandings of trauma, might complicate my discussion on therapeutic writing as a limited goal. These works might suggest potentially exciting intersections between these bodies of work.

Based on my work at the residential rehabilitation facility, which partially sparked this research, I also suggest that future researchers look into developing LGBTQQIA community writing groups for youth and examine the kinds of approaches that may work well for youth writers. A number of groups, including one in Boulder, Colorado, are doing community writing work with LGBTQQIA youth, and it would be useful to know what kinds of approaches are used and what kinds of challenges are faced by the facilitators of these groups. The stakes are high for middle- and high-school students, where more and more kids come out in a climate of Gay-Straight Alliances, Days of Silence, and increased media visibility of out people, there is an undercurrent of backlash that seeks to undermine support for these students. In 2011, when the West Virginia schools revised their anti-bullying policy to include gender categories including sexual and gender identities, a number of conservative groups spoke against it, including the

Family Policy Council and The West Virginia Family Foundation, whose president Kevin McCoy said the anti-bullying policy's inclusion of sexual and gender identities "undermines [West Virginians'] values and their religious teaching" (Gieseke). A youth-based activist writing group might help LGBTQQIA adolescents take on school policies and climate.

I hope that my research opens dialogue. In "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Alcoff cites Spivak's concept of "speaking to" rather than "for":

> In the end Spivak prefers a "speaking to," in which the intellectual neither abnegates his or her discursive role nor presumes an authenticity of the oppressed but still allows for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a "countersentence" that can then suggest a new historical narrative. (Alcoff 23)

A countersentence from the unique discourse that can only come from "the strength one can draw from living on the margins, the special acuity that comes from viewing the world from a decentered spot" would enrich this work and may improve writing groups as an activist tool (Malinowitz 142). I would like for my work to lead both to further research and to further activism, to countersentences from activists in the margins, and hopefully to activist writing groups whose writing will further the transformative impact of queer theory.

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