ENVISIONING QUEER THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA: DEVELOPING A

COMMUNITY-BASED WORKSHOP IN MEDIA ANALYSIS FOR

LGBTQIA+ YOUTH

By

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For my parents, my favorite human being, the Mauve Hand, and the us'es.

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Abstract

This project consists of a proposed curriculum for a semester-long, community-based workshop for LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual or ally, "+" indicating other identifications that deviate from heterosexual) youth ages 16-18. The workshop focuses on an exploration of LGBTQIA+ identity and community through discussion and collaborative rhetorical analysis of visual and social media. Informed by queer theory and history, studies on youth work, and visual media studies and incorporating rhetorical criticism as well as liberatory pedagogy and community literacy practices, the participation-based design of the workshop seeks to involve participants in selection of media texts, active analytical viewership, and multimodal response. The workshop is designed to engage participants in reflection on questions of individual and collective responsibility and agency as members and allies of various communities. The goal of the workshop is to strengthen participants' abilities to analyze the complex ways in which television, film, and social media influence their own and others' perceptions of issues surrounding queer identities. As part of the reflective process, participants are challenged to consider how they can in turn actively and collaboratively respond to and potentially help to shape these perceptions. My project report details the theoretical framework,

pedagogical rationale, methods of text selection and critical analysis, and

guidelines for conduct that inform and structure the workshop.

Introduction

One Tuesday night when I was in the fifth grade, I realized my favorite character from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Willow, the witty, redheaded female witch, was romantically involved with a sweet and timid fellow witch, Tara. At the time, same-sex attraction between women seemed natural but verboten to me for some reason. I didn't even know what a *lesbian* was when I noticed the first subtle hints about their relationship throughout the show's fourth season. I became fascinated by their relationship and couldn't wait to see more of them onscreen. By the time Tara sang a love song ("Under Your Spell") to Willow in the show's musical episode, I was already dating a girl in my small Catholic school class who was also an avid *Buffy* fan. It wasn't until the anticipated confirmation of Willow and Tara's relationship that I thought, "Well, if Willow can be with a woman, it's okay if I want to be with one, too." Thus, it is in part my own experience that led me to the subject of my Master's project, "Envisioning Queer through Digital Media: Developing a Community-based Workshop in Media Analysis for LGBTQIA+ Youth."

In this report, I will discuss the approaches, theories, goals, and implications that inform and shape the materials, structure, and prospective schedule of a 15-week (university semester-long) workshop focusing on the analysis of media for queer youth ages sixteen to eighteen (16-18). The

workshop will focus on the media's role in forming perceptions of sexuality and gender identities as well as generating communities and comfort (or discomfort) with self and other members of LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, questioning, intersex, ally, asexual, "+" includes identities that are self-asserted). The scope of suggested media for the workshop includes a range of historical and contemporary web-based, theatrical, and televised texts as well as films, advertisements, social media examples, and other examples of socially mediated activism in order to explore the portrayal, visibility, identities, and communities that comprise LGBTQIA+.

The central outcome of the workshop will be learning to discuss and drawing connections between instances of queer media representation and lived realities. Local contexts create pathways to discuss shifting examples of media representation and share suggestions amongst the participants, myself included. In the workshop I alternately refer to myself as the person who implements the workshop or the "mentor" that could adopt the workshop model detailed throughout this report. As we deconstruct and analyze existing media, my goal as the mentor is that participants will begin recognizing their knowledge as necessary to crafting a successful and sustainable workshop of this nature and to creating more consciously

informed, digital responses to the world around us. As a role model and participant, part of my mission within the workshop is to equip the students with new vocabulary and tools to articulate analytical concepts that will assist them as they prepare to enter or contemplate entry into a college setting, or approach media in their everyday lives. Although I provide preliminary suggestions and an experimental schedule as the starting point for the workshop, this is not meant to be the operational status quo; as a participant of the workshop, the mentor's goal should always be to encourage thoughtful media "praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire 51), whether that transformation takes place in a more private analytical lens or public mediated lens. Using a mix of media platforms that most of the attendees interact with on a regular basis, we will explore how texts, visuals, characters, and storylines influence the way we envision identity and community of other members of the spectrum and ourselves.

The workshop seeks to engage young adults in the discussion and collaborative analysis of visual media and community to create visual and digital responses through blogging, digitally mapping the connections between the texts we analyze, and one final or a set of collaborative responses (depending on the number of participants in the workshop). Embracing the

notion that critical "reading and viewing are thus processes of give and take" (Sturken and Cartwright 77), these tangible responses to the media we encounter will contemplate ways to generate respectful narratives and honor our expertise as an LGBTQIA+ community. We'll collaboratively create a digital media map throughout the workshop meetings by using the tools available through Google Drive. This digital media map will be produced through participant and mentor suggestion; I will give the participants a chance to contribute to the design of the map in the first iteration of the project and chart the themes we've encountered, making ties between existing media representations and their impact on us in various community contexts. Every workshop will create new opportunities to expand the media map and create a chance for sustainable materials to be cultivated, stored, and shared. I also plan to implement the use of a password protected Tumblr as a way of logging and sharing found materials and media ideas as digital support for the workshop; to prepare, I've already designed the Tumblr and generated an account for the purpose of the workshop. (http://projectlgbtqiaplusmedia.tumblr.com/, password: mickael). Tumblr not only functions a site where students can submit recommended media and post suggestions, but it also provides a place where we can continue to reach out to each other both between weekly meetings and after the workshop is over.

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In the workshop, I strive to create an environment in which each member holds a shared "conviction… to be an active participant and not a passive consumer" (hooks 14) as we discuss media examples of queer representations. Utilizing personal computers, Netflix, HBO Go, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and Youtube as well as the provided technologies and resources of the workshop location, the mentor will begin by providing an overview of Sonja Foss's framing of cluster, fantasy-theme, and ideological criticism in order to have a tool for analyzing smaller forms of media. All of the participants will work to select material throughout the course of the workshop, beginning in the first version of the workshop by selecting from a list of predetermined suggestions provided by the mentor; although this stands as a starting point, openness to student suggestions is a necessity of this project. Collaborative media selections will allow us to bring together considerations of social categories (e.g. race, gender, class, self-expression, etc.), with rhetorical analysis and media representations of queer life. Working to reflect upon cultural samples (or artifacts) that comprise various kinds of digital media, the attendees will critically examine and contribute to the media landscape by producing less simplistic or derogatory depictions of the queer community in the future.

Considerations of Queer: Community & Prospective Locations

In *A Positive View of LGBTQ*, Riggle and Rostosky assert that
"*community* has many meanings," that community "may" or "can" be a blend
of virtual and face-to-face experiences with other people, and that "sometimes
community forms around shared activities such as reading" or, I argue,
viewing media texts (127). As I discuss the workshop plan, suggested
timeline, and pedagogical rationale, I contemplate "community" in different
ways. At times, I make reference to the local "queer" or "gay" community to
refer to the LGBTQIA+ population surrounding the location of the workshop,
Western New York, although it is designed with the intention of applicability
to other communities. I use the designator "global" as a reference to the
"*collection* of communities" (Riggle and Rostosky 128) within LGBTQIA+ at
large; I specifically use this acronym to represent the broad concept of queer
and inclusivity that I incorporate as one of the founding principles of the
workshop. Heterosexual allies are included within the spectrum and are
invited to participate in the workshop because informed contemplations of
queer fueled by acceptance and empathy stand as some of the responsibilities
for allies of the LGBTQIA+ community. As the workshop mentor, I seek to
use both face-to-face discussions, shared opportunities to view and suggest
material, and implement a virtual support system for others. As the mentor, I
also strive to provide analytical training and opportunities for participants to

learn from each other as part of a deeper understanding of digital media's

influence and also their responsibility as members or allies of the LGBTQIA+

community.

I have chosen a New York community center, specifically the Drop-In

Center of Gay and Lesbian Youth Services (GLYS) in Buffalo, New York, as

the inspiration for the workshop setting because of my familiarity with this

facility and the support and resources provided to the young adult attendees.

The workshop's mission responds directly to the center's desire to cultivate

the critical thinking processes necessary to address the challenges of living

day-to-day within various communities as young queer-identified or allied

people ("Mission Statement and More"). Since 1983, it has been GLYS's

mission "to provide an accepting environment to enhance the personal growth

of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth in Western

New York [and] advocate… for community awareness and acceptance of

young people of all sexual orientations and gender identities." As a series of

screenings and discussions focused on "peer interaction and educational

experiences" and through reflection and rhetorical analysis of media

examples, the workshop will strive to support GLYS's mission to "create…

opportunities for [individual] emotional growth and community awareness"

(GLYS). While GLYS serves as the example location for the workshop, I also

integrate considerations for implementation of the workshop at the Brooklyn

Community Pride Center (BCPC), where the workshop will be piloted this

summer, and consider how this local community interacts with digital media

and rhetoric.

Classes in queer visual media analysis are offered through colleges and

universities across the country, mostly through Gender & Women's Studies

programs. However, there are very few instances where a class of this nature

is implemented for high school students takes place without a university

partnership. Both of the aforementioned settings, GLYS in Western New

York and BCPC in Downtown Brooklyn, lie in close geographical proximity to

universities and technology schools. Workshops, seminars, and community

events offered within these centers for LGBTQIA+ youth span a range of

topics, including, for example, the importance of self-expression, writer's

meetings, sex and body image and dance classes for all genders, and safe sex

Q & A sessions. Community centers surrounding GLYS and BCPC, like the

Pride Center of Western New York and the resources in the five boroughs of

New York City (reachable by an extensive subway system), offer extended

areas for support and potential locations for iterations of the workshop. The

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center in New York

City hosts "Rated Q," a weekly meeting where films are screened (there is no

indication on the website of whether or not discussions follow the screenings).

My workshop takes inspiration from this type of weekly event and provides a

scaffolded schedule, with connected weekly workshop sessions, the

construction of a visual map of media to be digitally preserved on Google

Drive and Tumblr, digital support, and the option of producing a culminating

collaborative project. As the mentor of the workshop described throughout

this report, my knowledge of various digital technologies, community literacy

theory, Foss's suggested modes of rhetorical analysis, and visual media

analysis and film studies will intertwine with the analytical lenses of the

participants involved to help shape each of the discussions, optional

collaborative projects, and analyses and selections of media throughout the

workshop.

The workshop can be altered for application to facilities in other

geographic locations, but meetings should optimally take place in a center

that caters primarily to queer youth and their allies to enhance the potential

for a comfortable dynamic for discussion. A setting such as this precludes the

automatic presumption of heterosexuality and is less stressful than, for

instance, coming out in a university classroom where one is potentially "the

token" homosexual other if a queer identity is asserted openly. Particularly if

other students convey homophobic tendencies, the classroom may work to

silence and regulate the way students interact with their peers. As a case in point, I launched the "Same Love" and "Make It Stop" lesson proposed as one of the topics for Week Four in the schedule as a lesson for my First-Year Composition class at Michigan Technological University. While the majority of students were receptive to the texts as examples for analysis, one student made very clear that he was made uncomfortable by verbally attacking me in homework assignments, making inappropriate comments regarding the subject matter, and creating distractions for the other students during a peer activity. The student's rude comments, as part of a mainstream class, worked to silence any queer voices in the room and made other class members uncomfortable. Although this student sought to dominate the lecture with disrespect, several classmates asked him to stop, saying that his behavior was "not cool." Although a workshop with majority of queer students does not guarantee an environment without debate or conflict, respect for others takes utmost importance in setting the dynamic of critical reflection that may be grounded in personal narratives about the impact of media. This respect, although not ensured by the workshop setting, is more possible with the resources and welcoming climate provided to queer youth at LGBTQIA+ centers; in mainstream classes, queer students are faced with the stress and worry of being harassed, assaulted, or insulted. With an understanding mentor and support system, rather than an individual with little

understanding of or empathy for the complexities that come with a queer identity, queer youth have a chance to learn from the expertise of others who have lived through struggles similar to their own.

Since setting plays a large role in developing the workshop community, community-specific texts (texts produced by former workshop participants, locally produced texts in the workshop's geographic location and the larger LGBTQIA+ community), acts, events, social media, and activism should be considered as potential texts for analysis in the workshop by the participants. Mentors planning to implement the workshop in other community settings should survey the media landscape and local community surrounding the workshop in order to integrate community-relevant examples on the impact of media within a specific community. The mentor is also encouraged to consider other analytical frames (i.e. rhetorical, historical, feminist) as media texts are explored.

Using a University Model as an Independent Mentor and Establishing Tiers of Support

My status as a member of the LGBTQI community (in the mix of the white, female, graduate student, brunette, lower middle-class that assembles my own identity) does not offer me immediate access to a community of younger queer people and allies. As I approach the workshop, the nature of

my role comes into question: at times, I will have to negotiate operating as a participant, analyst, leader, role model, and researcher, with opportunities to blend responsibilities between each of these roles. The term "mentor" seems appropriate as a descriptor for my leadership in the workshop because it most closely embodies the role I seek to fill as a contributor to workshop dialogue but also the person responsible for organizing the workshop itself. As a mentor, the participants will be encouraged to view me not as a professor who disperses knowledge, but as a facilitator of the workshop who also contributes and collaborates with others in shaping analysis and discussion. I plan to make participants aware of my additional responsibilities as a workshop participant, including the contribution of my own perspective as a media viewer and analyst in workshop discussions, since my participation in media selection is equally important as that of the other participants. Although the expertise I bring to the workshop is no more or less important than the expertise of the other participants, as someone who has formally studied media analysis I will lead and organize the workshop as a mentor and discussion facilitator. Adhering to Grabill's standards for a "community-based researcher," I will "draw on the practice of working with people to answer questions [of digital media] and solve problems" (212). As a researcher, I will maintain flexibility and dedicate time to revising and continuing to refine the workshop plan as I implement it in

different locations; blending my roles as researcher, mentor, and participant, I approach the workshop with an understanding that I have a responsibility to create a sustainable workshop based on the successes of previous workshops and suggestions from other participants. By offering a safe place for students to discuss their perspectives and respond creatively and digitally to media, I hope that in my role as mentor I am a role model for the participants as well.

In order to ensure reciprocity in the dynamics of the workshop, the mentor should contribute with the participants to create sustainable materials that will continue to inform later iterations to be implemented in the workshop location. Through discussion, sharing our own stories, and attention to everyday issues for LGBTQIA+ youth, the project will foster the collaborative revision of activities and the workshop's viewing schedule to encourage reflection and active participation by all participants. As the mentor, I will construct the community of my course as I work (Grabill 213) by providing my own feedback as a fellow participant of the group. Recognizing the importance of my *stance* as a mentor and researcher interested in community-based inquiry, I must be flexible in understanding that "communities don't exist ready-formed and discoverable" (213) and that each workshop community will be unique in some ways. As the mentor, I will

constantly reconsider how to incorporate all participant voices and concerns and shift the schedule according to student needs. Each implementation of the workshop will require mentors to learn how to navigate their role in order to help the students themselves navigate rhetorical analysis of media depictions.

Questions of "Queer" in Workshop Dynamics

The internal dynamics of the workshop are also important to consider. Although "many LGBTQ people express empathy and compassion for other oppressed or minority groups" (Riggle and Rostosky 120-1), misunderstanding or intolerance of certain identities *within* LGBTQIA+ communities (e.g. trans*, intersex, genderqueer, among others) still exists. Members may be reluctant to accept each other across the categories of LGBTQIA+ if they cannot empathize with others. Identification as a person within the spectrum does not guarantee acceptance from or understanding of all identities and perspectives that make up the broad spectrum; for example, depending on a particular gay community's dynamics, tension could arise through face-to-face and digital interactions amongst lesbian and gay contingents; in the same way, trans or bisexual individuals may face persecution from lesbian and gay people. In order to address the differences within the queer community and alleviate potential issues that may arise

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with the students, I will encourage texts that represent gender and sexuality as spectrums rather than binaries (male or female, gay/lesbian or straight). The 2013 film *Tomboy* works toward this goal while intertwining issues of trans* youth and community. While in the workshop, identities are up for discussion and assertion: if someone asserts a particular identity, others cannot argue or try to persuade that person to "choose" an identity they are not comfortable with. By encouraging the embrace of diversity across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, issues that relate to difference will be regulated by setting acceptance as the foundation from the beginning of the workshop.

Within the LGBTQIA+ community there has been a continuing debate about whether or not trans* and intersex individuals should be included as part of the spectrum as well as a persistent struggle to assert a precise meaning of "queer," a term that is sometimes considered a verb (to *queer*), adjective (traditionally used to describe something strange), identity, or insult (Shlasko 2006). "Queer" possesses multiple meanings (124) and is embraced or rejected in different ways by members of the community. While members of the queer community have historically viewed the term as an insult, I would encourage students to embrace the term's ability to represent a spectrum: "by placing queerness… at the center of analysis, queer theory can gain a unique perspective… on the processes by which normalcy, and

deviance are constructed" (Britzman, 1998; Green, 1996; Sullivan, 2003; referenced by Shlasko 124). Although queer representations of media serve as the analytical focus for the workshop, we will also strive to create the opportunity to personalize media in a discussion-based setting "and explore new roles and ways of expressing ourselves,… [with] compassion and empathy for others"; as media analysts, participants in a dialogue that focuses on media influence, and individuals with various experience levels with technology and media, the workshop encourages the participants to "find role models and be role models… and work with others" (Riggle and Rostosky 128).

The Impact of Media on Queer and Allied Youth

In the past two decades, the number of visible LGBTQIA+ characters and storylines in television, video games, and film has increased dramatically. In the early 1990s, texts with queer characters, like *Paris Is Burning* (1990), brought about B. Ruby Rich's introduction of the term "New Queer Cinema (NQC)" in 1992 (Aaron 33). In the past decade, viewers have peeked into the lives of Ellen DeGeneres and other celebrities whose coming out caused radical changes for their careers; in addition, the world of Twitter, Tumblr, Netflix, and Facebook has expanded the potential to connect with others through words, visuals, suggested friends and films. Gay cowboys

(*Brokeback Mountain*), lesbian witches (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), trans inmates (*Orange is the New Black*), bisexual bloggers (*The L Word*), intersex beauty queens (*Faking It*), and whole communities stunned by a devastating murder (*The Laramie Project*) have come to life on both big and little screens, providing an accessible way for closeted or queer youth to privately contemplate or imagine what it means to be queer if they are not yet comfortable with being out. As Sturken and Cartwright note,

> Our pleasure in looking may be strongly tied to our cultural and sexual identities and preferences, but we must always remember that looking practices are strongly bound up in fantasy. We may use images to conjure fantasies about who we are, what we do, and what others do in frame or on screen, and these fantasies may be quite different from what we do with…others in life (131-2).

Despite the marked rise in visibility for queer characters, one-dimensional, problematic representations continue to be popularized and certain narrow perspectives and stereotypes of "queer" continue to proliferate through inaccurate and disrespectful narratives. These representations are opportunities to construct more respectful, conscious narratives that portray the complexity and richness of queer life in contemporary contexts. Media can stand as a site for learning and embracing identity, culture, attitudes, and

values. As Poole notes, when "you are struggling with identifying as other than 'straight,' television and other media sources offer a smorgasbord… where one can absorb behaviors, values, and attitudes that should be associated with particular identities" (280). Although shows such as Showtime's *The L Word* (2004 – 2009) might be considered a distinct step in the right direction for the visibility of lipstick lesbians and a glamourized gay life, many viewers felt that it neglected to embody and respect the lived realities of lesbians, trans*, and bisexuals off-screen.

Digital outlets and media provide a safe way for closeted or questioning individuals to learn about queer history and culture, respond publicly to what they see, and provide a level of anonymity and comfort in working through identity issues. Encouraging queer youth to recognize the rhetorical influence and real world impact of media representation both within and outside of the larger LGBTQIA+ community will encourage conscious reflection on their own identity formation, concept of community, and how our perceptions are shaped by the depictions that surround us. By creating a space for analysis through personal readings of media texts, the discussion and responses of the workshop will strive towards "new understandings of self and sexual identity" (Hammer 147) for queer youth. An analytical eye for media will offer youth a chance to further understand

how television, film, social media, Facebook, Youtube, Tumblr, blogs, digital

outreach, and local activism influence their own concepts of identity, their

perceptions of queer and other identities, and their sense of what community

and belonging to a community entails.

Applying their understandings of queer and digital media in local and

larger (global) contexts, workshop participants will produce digital responses

or personal interactions fueled by different kinds of literacies. Literacy, as a

"dialogue *with others* on issues that they identify as sites of struggle" (Flower

19) is encouraged through contemplation of community and media influence.

Examples of literate practices that could arise from the workshop range from

drafting and releasing articulate and informed public responses through

media platforms, investigating the ideologies contained within media

depictions, understanding the different levels of implications for queer

representation in the media, and examining potential avenues to create more

productive responses of queer life across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Visual

literacy entails the ability to start to contribute to a critical dialogue about

digital media. Combined with individual expertise, visually literate

responses, sustainable digital materials, and media presence, as well as a

deeper understanding and digital support system have the potential to

counteract the "stereotyping [and negative depictions of LGBTQIA+ are] fed

by the silence that many gay people learn for their own safety and protection"
(Campbell and Carilli 43). For queer people, visual literacy offers a chance to
reframe or problematize dominant discourses that value certain perspectives
and voices over others.

One way to further define visual literacy for the participants is to
examine and discuss work such as Jason Robert Ballard's use of digital media
to focus on trans* rights and acceptance. Ballard's experimentation with
media tools and graphic design, complemented by his awareness of the local
and global communities he occupies (i.e. the trans* community at large, the
queer community in Rochester, NY, interactions with other trans* men and
subscribers to FTM Magazine), has been accessed by multiple sections of the
LGBTQIA+ spectrum: for example, his transition has been documented
across social media outlets, one of his photographs has gone "viral," and he
launched a magazine that caters specifically to FTM (female to male)
transgender people). Ballard's visually literate practices provide an example
for this workshop that encourages participants to broaden their knowledge of
visual media representations and tools in order to gain access, awareness,
and agency for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

With GLYS and BCPC as sites that provide a "safe space" for queer
youth, community literacy theory sets the stage for this workshop in that,

like "queer," the term itself cannot be simplified "to a cleanly drawn, internally self-consistent edifice of words and ideas" (Flower 45). Flower conceptualizes community literacy as "an intercultural dialogue *with* others on issues that *they* identify as sites of struggle… It begins its work when community folk, and university faculty start naming and solving problems *together*" (Flower 19). This workshop applies Flower's definition in the sense that I am approaching the community as a former university instructor, media analyst, and queer woman seeking to start a dialogue with young adults about media's influence in our lives. By placing emphasis on the importance of participant contribution in discussion, I seek to engage the formation of responses to media across the spectrum of difference in LGBTQIA+ through analytical and community-conscious frames. As we consider media depictions and analyze symbols of queer visibility in media, the participants will refine their eye for themes and symbols in the media, producing conscious responses. Collaborative workshop development contributes to participant sense of agency by valuing contributor input. We will reflect how media (social, digital, and visual) impact our perceptions of identity, lifestyle, alliance, and community with an emphasis on creating more empathetic narratives by and for queer people.

Methodology & Pedagogical Support

My project blends several methodologies from community literacy theory and visual media studies. Using cluster and fantasy-theme criticism, the participants will engage in the process of coding and organizing the themes and ideologies represented within media texts. The steps of ideological criticism will help us identify "a set or pattern of beliefs that evaluates relevant issues and topics for a group, provides an interpretation of some domain of the world, and encourages particular attitudes and actions to it" (Foss 210).

Viewing Through An Analytical Lens: Rhetorical Critique Using Foss, Burke, and Bormann

Rhetorical analysis of visual media grounds the workshop and Sonja Foss's approach to rhetorical criticism provides participants with a step-by-step starting point to give names to concepts they've possibly contemplated already as they approach media texts. Foss's work places emphasis on the importance of symbols and examining their use, which is crucial to the analytical goals of the workshop. Subtle or overt symbols and representations of queer life in all forms of digital media reach out to closeted youth but problematic representations have the potential to negatively influence queer youth or cause them to misinterpret messages about queer life. In digital

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texts, a "viable sense of 'queer' is often conceptually so alienated from the real diversity of LGBTQIA+ communities that its cultural products risk serving as mere tokens for the vicarious entertainment of majority straights" (Bronski et. al 118). Because stereotypes and heteronormative expectations continue to influence LGBTQIA+ narratives and depictions, it is important for queer people, particularly queer youth, to be able to critically analyze how they are represented in media depictions "in a more conscious, systematic, and focused way" (Foss 6).

Using summaries of Sonja Foss's definitions and steps for completing rhetorical analysis, we'll incrementally establish the language of the course by providing terms for concepts we will discuss throughout the workshop. Foss's work on rhetorical critique not only provides participants with a step-by-step procedure for constructing analytical responses to media but also gives approachable definitions and explanations to concepts that permeate college classrooms (understanding various ideologies takes the forefront here). In *Rhetorical Criticism*, Foss details Neo-Aristotelian criticism and suggests other modes of critique that could be applied in this workshop, but I incorporate cluster, fantasy-theme, and ideological criticism throughout the workshop because they are approachable for younger audiences as an introduction to rhetorical critique. Cluster and fantasy-theme criticism

present the opportunity for participants to organize themes and patterns within media texts in order to compare them more widely, while ideological criticism presents a broad range of foci for critique of the voices, values, attitudes, and beliefs that inform historical, community, and contemporary media texts.

We will approach rhetorical analysis in the workshop by reviewing Foss's definition of rhetoric and its tenets. Foss defines rhetoric as "the human use of symbols to communicate" and identifies humans as rhetors (the users of rhetoric), symbols as the vehicle, and communication as the goal (3). Foss simplifies the process of rhetorical analysis into three primary steps: picking an artifact (or analyzed text), devising a research question based on analysis and observations and discussing your findings (9). Throughout the workshop, we will engage in analyzing and discussing media artifacts through digital modes (i.e. through the Tumblr page, visual map, individual responses, and optional collaborative project(s)) to foster accessible and articulate responses. While interrogative questions can take the format of a traditional thesis statements concerning the symbolic underpinnings of an artifact, we will craft our thesis statements into discussion points, questions, and interpretations through which we engage media. Potential research questions to be used in the workshop could range in subject and vary in their

questioning of how the communication process functions (11); questions may be raised such as "what is the ideal audience constructed by and for… TV shows?" (11) or might incorporate the kairos, setting, and "situation in an artifact, or whether the artifact adequately addresses an exigence in a particular situation" (11-2). Exigence, in the context of the workshop would be measured by its relevance to the community of the workshop and larger communities (in Buffalo or Brooklyn, in the United States, amongst specific populations within LGBTQIA+, etc.). Through media examples with varying ranges of effects, participants will analyze media's impact for LGBTQIA+ individuals and how what we see contributes to our understandings of queer identity and community. Examples of depictions and themes for analysis suggested for the workshop include both fictional and real-world symbols and representations of LGBTQIA+ identity such as Ian Gallagher and Mickey Milkovich's contributions to the understanding of working class, community, and a romantic gay relationship in *Shameless*; Jason Robert Ballard's recreation of an image of Adam Levine for *FTM Magazine*; the portrayal of gender fluidity in childhood and community in *Tomboy*; and the roles of camaraderie, race, and queerness in *Orange is the New Black*. Through examining these types of texts and community events with a rhetorically analytical lens, young queer, questioning, or allied students have the opportunity to develop a mutual understanding of and appreciation for

recognizable queer markers. Through the prospective avenues of cluster, fantasy-theme, and ideological criticism, we will be able to explore the thematic keywords and concepts that inform the media we consume daily alongside our preexisting understandings of media. By encouraging students to view media within the organizing frameworks detailed in Foss's work, a starting point and vocabulary will be established as we work through our analyses and discuss what we view in the workshop.

In her description of Kenneth Burke's mode of cluster criticism, Foss asserts that charting clustering symbols reveals meanings and ideologies and themes to ??? repeated key terms in an analyzed text, act, or series of symbols (65). I plan to introduce this concept by noting some of the clustering terms that could surround "queer." Research questions formulated from analyzing key terms and identifying their clustering terms could include what "strategies are used to accomplish particular objectives… [or] the kinds of meaning that are being communicated, or the implications of particular constructions of meaning for rhetorical processes or public controversies" (69). During the first session in the proposed schedule, I suggest viewing Ruby Rose's Youtube video "Break Free." As an androgynous model, Rose uses her media influence to explore non-binary gender representation. We could cluster terms around Rose's interpretation of gender fluidity including

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"androgyny" and "visibility" as the visual key terms in the artifact. Through discussion of the material and analysis informed by Foss's recommended mode of cluster criticism and the perspectives of the participants, we will work through the impact that can be made by rhetorically constructed responses that are mindful of community influence (for example, we could question Rose's portrayal of genderqueer or gender fluidity. How is the narrative framed? How would other strategies impact the story of the video?).

Foss notes that fantasy-theme criticism, established by Ernest G. Bormann, allows an analyst to break down shared interpretations (fantasy themes) of artifacts, verified by their communication between groups (Foss 97). Relying on the assumptions of "symbolic convergence theory" that "communication creates reality" and "symbols can converge to create a shared reality or community consciousness" (97), fantasy theme criticism involves the "coding" or highlighting of an artifact to find the themes of setting, character, and action in constructing the reoccurring themes that inform the rhetorical vision in the artifact (101,103). Questions about fantasy-themes could center on "strategies used to accomplish specific objectives, the kinds of messages that are being communicated through particular rhetorical visions…or the implications of certain rhetorical visions" (103). For example, we could construct a fantasy theme analysis comparing Macklemore's "Same

Love" and "Make It Stop" by Rise Against! (suggested for week four). Fantasy-theme criticism allows the chance for the participants of the workshop to dive into the artifacts we analyze and verbalize the rhetorical impact of the examples we choose to view in the workshop.

Foss's discussion of ideological analysis provides brief yet informative summaries of critical terms such as hegemony (210), structuralism (211), Marxism (211), deconstructionism (212), and postmodernism (212). An ideological criticism is formed based on how "the critic articulates ideas, references, themes, allusions, or concepts that are suggested by the presented elements" of the artifact (216). By organizing themes and elements of the text "into a coherent framework"(217), participants can reflect upon the artifact's implicit ideologies. Some questions Foss suggests for addressing the ideologies within an artifact include "what is the preferred reading of the artifact?; what does the artifact ask the audience to believe, understand, feel, or think about?" (218). In the suggested first meeting, we could form an ideological criticism based on Jason Robert Ballard's work with Aydian Dowling and the viral recreation of an almost nude photo of Adam Levine, asking "what does Aydian's photo, compared to the one of the Maroon 5 frontman, ask straight audiences to consider?" My final media suggestion (the film *Tomboy*, to be viewed in our Week 13 session) has ideological

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implications as a text about gender fluidity with a young child as the main character of the film. As we follow Mickael's journey in making friends in his new neighborhood, we see his life at home as the daughter and big sister in a loving family. By examining this text for ideologies surrounding gender fluidity, we can reveal the implications of the narrative composed by the film.

Visual Media Theory and Rhetorical Analysis

Queer analysis of media texts challenges the dominant discourse that shapes the way we view media as individuals and larger groups of people. According to Alexander and Losh, "Within concepts of queer identity there is not only a move toward community,… but also a gesture of critique – a critique of the normalizing categorizations of people into gay and straight" (42). Throughout the workshop, I will draw on work from visual media studies in conjunction with Foss's work on rhetorical analysis to encourage participants to diversify their viewing practices and challenge their perceptions of media. By incorporating historical, local, and modern queer media representations and rhetorical acts, we can engage in "negotiated looking" where queer subplots and stories arise in performances of androgyny and friendships between individuals of the same gender and where subtle allusions to queer relationships are made (e.g. Idgie and Ruth in *Fried Green Tomatoes,* initial scenes in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* the character dynamics

in *The Laramie Project*, the song "Same Love" by Macklemore) (Sturken and

Cartwright 77). By alternating these representations with those that tackle

queerness more obviously or directly (e.g. *The L Word*, *Queer as Folk*,

Shameless, *Tomboy*, the lyrics of Rise Against! "Make It Stop"), a range of

topics across time with varying modes of queer visibility will be included as

potential texts for analysis.

Participants will be asked to suggest media topics for analysis during

the workshop but the mentor can suggest topics for consideration as well. For

example, if the group chooses to focus on investigating transnarratives, *Boys*

Don't Cry and *Orange is the New Black* could be offered as two potential

texts. For Kimberley Peirce's film *Boys Don't Cry*, as mentor I might

incorporate Judith Halberstam's work on the "transgender gaze" as part of

the discussion and reflect upon the film from a variety of perspectives.

Halberstam asserts that we can view *Boys Don't Cry* as a contemplation of

how trans and temporality coincide, how trans visibility and passing comes

into play, and how Peirce operates as a director in sustaining a transgender

look in the film. In the workshop, we could work through the rhetorical

underpinnings of why and how certain choices impact the way the film is

watched and how queer themes interacts with other social interests that

problematize our ideas of identity and community; for example, Pierce clearly

depicts the class status of Brandon and Lana in the various trailer homes (true to reality) but, as Halberstam notes, "sacrifices the racial complexity of the narrative by erasing the story of… Philip DeVine," (Halberstam 91). This concept of the transgender look and how it is constructed in films that discuss trans or genderqueer perspectives have the potential to uncover various clusters, fantasy-themes, and ideologies that could be linked as similar themes that comprise the narratives that are available during the late 1990s.

Incorporating visual media studies into the analysis of more contemporary materials, like *Orange is the New Black*, or local events and acts is also a possibility. In the analysis of *Orange is the New Black* as transnarrative, participants could cluster the reactions of inmates to Sophia Burset, a transwoman portrayed by trans activist Laverne Cox, while also considering the work that Cox does as an activist off-screen. By considering the layers of Cox's influence as a media figure, we can explore a range of interpretations set forth by Cox's performance as Sophia Burset and the actions she takes in the real world. By blending real-world and fictional depictions of queer activism and life, we will work towards "achieving critical insight [which happens] by reflecting on shared situated themes… consciousness-raising then goes public, in transformative action that draws others into a dialogue of possibility" (Flower 132). Encouraging participants

to take a variety of rhetorical artifacts and acts into account and consider the themes that persist across various forms of media will foster attunement to the rhetorical underpinnings that impact the way that LGBTQIA+ and heterosexual viewers investigate and understand identities and communities.

Applying Liberatory Pedagogy and Community Literacy Theory to an *LGBTQIA+ Media Workshop*

This workshop design focuses strongly on discussion and contemplation, rather than starting with the goal of going out and making marked changes in the local or global community. Through collaboration, even in a small group, the members will be challenged to reconsider held perspectives and will be encouraged to exchange ideas of what constitutes effective and truthful (as well as ineffective and harmful) representation, communication and action. Productive discussions, if fostered efficiently and effectively through establishing a comfortable environment within the workshop, will not only open up the floor to new and personalized connections and perspectives of misunderstood identities but should achieve a sense of democracy "where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute" (hooks 39) to an effective understanding of difference. Through the workshop, the students and I will engage in "combining the analytical [as well as historical] and experiential [in] a richer way of knowing" (hooks 89). The "end-in-view" for

each of the students would be to learn to "speak up for one's self [and] culture with a 'special' personal voice" (Flower 124) that aims for comfort with identity and reflection on what identification as a member of the LGBTQ community means; whether this leads to activism, new knowledge, varied and informed perspective, or self-realization will be dependent upon the student and what he/she/they/hir/eir seek to gain from the workshop. With the aim of creating a sense of critical awareness and engagement, I hope to cultivate a shared "conviction... to be an active participant and not a passive consumer" (hooks 14).

The workshop design and options for collaborative project(s) and individual activities are also influenced by the practices of the youth workshops in Linda Flower's *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* in that they strive toward encouraging action and critical thought. Borrowing from Caroline E. Heller's work with a women's writing group in *Until We Are Strong Together*, the workshop design encourages story-telling and collaboration to construct responses to analyzed media. My pedagogical approach is also influenced by the community-based research methodology detailed in Jeffrey Grabill's work "Community-Based Research and the Importance of Research Stance" in the sense that the participants will be engaged in the construction and revision of workshop discussions, our

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viewing list, the visual map, and the optional culminating project(s). In order
to ensure that students have ownership of the workshop, and to aid in
situating myself as a contributor rather than follow a "banking model"
(Freire, hooks) where I, as teacher, bestow knowledge upon the students (and
not the other way around), as I develop the work with the participating
students, I will rely upon their feedback and participation in order to
identify, understand, and construct a comfortable community that will allow
them to take agency over what they produce.

The workshop's pedagogical approach takes inspiration from Paulo
Freire's and bell hooks' methods of liberatory pedagogy in order to "educate
for critical consciousness" (hooks 127). Specifically this workshop adopts
Freire's goal of giving voice to those that have been historically oppressed, in
this case queer youth. Thus the workshop seeks to establish "a pedagogy…
forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed" (Freire 48). Building on Freire's
insistence that we ask who holds knowledge and move from the traditional
model where students "call themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the
one who has knowledge" (63), the workshop's value of participant
contribution must be stressed from the first meeting. By working through the
symbols, themes, key terms, and ideologies of media texts, dialogues
informed by critical thinking (92) and analysis can be fostered to generate

further discussions and prospective plans for thoughtful contributions to digital depictions of queer.

Built into this discussion of heteronormative society and the influence of social and visual media is a need for reflection and "interrogating habits of being as well as ideas" (hooks 43), including the challenge to "confront the biases that have shaped… practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies of sharing knowledge" (hooks 12). In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks discusses the implementation of Freire's liberatory pedagogical process from a feminist standpoint that is constantly cognizant of oppressive acts or practices. hooks argues that educators must be willing to enact teaching practices that value student experience and voice, a multicultural and inclusive point-of-view, and collective critical reflection about the oppressively limiting pedagogies that often thrive at the university level. The need to "change conventional ways of thinking about language" and form "spaces where diverse voices can speak in words other than English or in broken, vernacular speech" (173-4) offers support for the power of the strategic voice for an individual and the collective. Alongside arguing for the need to recognize different voices, class statuses, genders, and races that exist in the classroom setting, hooks also argues that we must recognize ourselves and our bodies in the classroom, and she encourages infusing

passion for knowledge and reinvented pedagogy into teaching. While the workshop allows for the recognition of difference in a community-based setting, mentors should apply creative approaches and site-specific considerations to ensure that the learning of rhetorical criticism and media critique is an engaging process for all participants.

Flower notes, "Historically silenced and marginalized people may not realize their own expertise, may not have the rhetorical tools to explain and elaborate it, and may not trust the outcome of personal disclosure or speaking out" (55). The safe space of the workshop is intended to give participants the floor to discuss their expertise with others who have also filled the role of an outsider in academic classes or other sites in the community. The workshop seeks to foster an active view of media that encourages "'discussing and exploring it with other people, and reflecting on how it connects to their own lives, families, and communities… [and] develop[ing]… 'internal symbol systems of imagery and language'" (Kosinski 194, in Fleckenstein 51). With the analysis of depictions of LGBTQIA+ in various forms of media as the basis for the workshop, the participants and I would focus on "the rules, roles, rituals, and relationships" (Flower 125) that are perpetuated by media images and social practices. Flower's work informs this project as it contemplates community and how to build a critical lens

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through a dialogical workshop. The "sophisticated literate practice of code-switching and transcultural positioning" is important to consider in "scaffold[ing] the strategic thinking that helps writers actually embrace difference [within the LGBTQ community] and seek out a common ground" (134). While the participating students may not initially see their responses, analyses, visual map, and culminating project(s) as the beginnings of "resistance," this more "passive [discussion-based] stance empowers [the participating student] by allowing and encouraging [them] to resist the authority and the limitations of mainstream society and its dominant discourses by speaking [their] own language" (Flower 128). The workshop places value on all participant perspectives with the intention of fostering "collective listening to one another [that] affirms the value and uniqueness of each voice" (hooks 84). The workshop will encourage thoughtful responses to the mediated world and understandings that invite "not only an increasingly wider public into [participant's] concerns but also led to transformations for [the participants themselves]" (Flower 63).

As discussed in Fleckenstein's *Vision, Rhetoric and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*, my responsibility as the mentor of the workshop will be to encourage the realization of participant agency and "mix… conventional and unconventional requirements to position students on the cusp between

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imagination and action, between the visual and discursive" (60). The
students' contemplation of LGBTQIA+ identity and critique of the
representations that are designed to increase visibility for the queer
community will encourage them to actively view (and perhaps resist)
stereotypes and flawed understandings that continue to influence the
embrace (or rejection) of queer people in mainstream American media and
culture. As part of enacting a liberatory pedagogy, the workshop is founded
on "necessarily embrac[ing] experience, confessions, and testimony as
relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning
process" (hooks 89). With the potential for students to contribute their own
perspectives of viewing queer depictions and engaging in social media,
particularly online, the workshop will focus on engaging deeper analysis of
social and visual media and reflect upon how we can use digital tools as
means of support for the workshop.

As the mentor in charge of administering the workshop, I must
preemptively assert the possibilities and challenges of fostering a safe,
secure, and trusting environment in the workshop. This project thus seeks to
answer Harriet Malinowitz's call for an approach to a course that would
"provide… the opportunity to excavate the meanings that underwrite
[societal]… beliefs [and practices]" (Malinowitz 75) in a discussion-heavy

environment that actively promotes nonjudgmental disclosure. Malinowitz

points out that in courses with a majority of LGBTQIA+ students, dialogue

has the potential to encourage members to "hear others express divergent

perceptions about themselves" and understand that a "self-concept" is "an

interpretive variety of…" aspects of gay existence (76). Depending on

preformed relationships amongst the participants, disclosure would be

encouraged by the environment of the Center but this does not mean that

participation would be automatic in all cases (Malinowitz 75). It is my goal to

create an upbeat dynamic that encourages the sharing and telling of stories

and perspectives, as encouraged by the welcoming environment of GLYS.

Malinowitz's work discusses issues that still impact the LGBTQ

identity and community and considers some of the issues that may arise

within the communities of the workshop while stressing the power of a

common understanding with varying definitions. She points out that "people

may share a word with which they define themselves, but the condition

signified by that word does not seem to be shared" (14) and conveys the

benefits of multiple interpretations through her experiences as a teacher

leading a class with a predominantly queer-identified concentration of

students. In her discussion of the employment of a liberatory type of

pedagogy, Malinowitz reflects on the works of Freire, Giroux, and Shor and

"the ways that subjectivities are produced" (101). In a class led by Malinowitz that was predominantly made up of lesbians and gays, she observed that the participating students'

> intuitive understanding and the understanding that came from
> community identification…, that critical analysis could find expression
> in social action,… and their experience of social action or interaction
> could be brought back into the class and subjected to further critical
> analysis, informing their approach to future action (Malinowitz 102).

This observation echoes the goals and prospective outcomes I seek for my project; although it dates from the 1990s, Malinowitz's discussion of pedagogy and approach influence my project in the sense of the value of drawing attention to aspects of identity and community that could help or hinder participation (e.g. varying levels or lack of familial support, varying levels of access to resources, the willingness or fear to share ideas, experiences with a larger group).

Structuring an Inclusive Workshop

From the first day, we will establish the boundaries and guidelines of this discussion-intensive environment, defining important terms through the analysis of queer print ads while getting acclimated with rhetorical theory and analysis. We will introduce ourselves and assert our identities from the

get-go by saying, "Hi, my name is (preferred name). I prefer (he/she/hir/their) pronouns and identify as a (lesbian/asexual/transgender/I don't identify)." Introductions that follow this model provide a safer space for genderqueer, questioning, or trans students to self-assert identities and establish the meaningfulness of group ownership. As a group, we will agree together to a code of conduct for the duration of the workshop and policies about how students will be held accountable for their attendance and contribution. We'll decide what happens in the case of absence or late or missed work, how we prefer to view media, the need for context and warnings about content, and begin to set up a visual media map online. From the beginning of the workshop, we will take an inventory of participant experiences with critical analysis and what media outlets they are accustomed to using. In order to welcome a variety of perspectives, it will be made clear from the first meeting that everyone asserts his/her/their/hir own identity and no one other participant can assign an identity to someone else or target them based on their perceived identity or preferences. During the first two weeks of workshop meetings, all participants will continue to collaboratively produce a set of discussion boundaries and guidelines as part of an "ice breaker" activity. The boundaries and guidelines will play a key role in setting the discussion climate of the workshop.

Because of its location in the heart of Buffalo, GLYS "serve[s] to connect the writers' workshop to the neighborhood in which it [will meet]" (Heller 9). Using the discussion-based environment of the Tenderloin Women Writers Workshop discussed in Heller's *Until We Are Strong Together* as a model to produce reflective responses that engage the participants, I would use the first meetings to gauge, through discussion, "what personal, social, educational, and political functions the… workshop [would] serve for those who attend it" (Heller 16) and get the participants to spend time thinking about their media networks. Flower discusses the importance of fostering dialogue (50) and blending active and writer-controlled strategies alongside "strategies that draw out narrative, reflective interpretation and reveal situated knowledge [but also]… do the analytical work of proposing and testing hypotheses and options" (59). In order to evaluate what shifts I may need to make in producing pedagogically sound and effective digital projects with the students, I need to assess the knowledge, proficiencies, and media preferences they possess as they begin the workshop. Blending examples from the approaches of Heller, Flower, and hooks, I will strive to encourage students to become comfortable with their voices and LGBTQIA+ identit(ies) as digital communicators, develop a sense of community and pride with other writers, and embrace an individualized, self-aware sense of their queer identity and membership within the local LGBTQIA+ community. Although

material is suggested and summarized in the supplementary materials of this report, students will be asked if they would like to alter the suggested viewing list and will have the opportunity to choose the forms of media they would like to analyze with the focus on community and identity and the clustered issues devised in discussion. Once we've reviewed modes of rhetorical criticism and analyzed several texts, students will suggest content based on their preferences or provided suggestions and devise discussion questions for selected content. Depending on how many participants continue to attend the workshop, the selection process can be collaborative and can take a comparative or analytical stance.

In selecting viewing materials, I apply the selection guidelines suggested by Logan, Lasswell, Hood, and Watson in "Criteria for Selecting Young Adult Literature." Although the selection criteria discussed by Logan et al. is targeted for young adult novels rather than films, the selection process for visual media should also involve identifying texts that challenge participants "in processes such as comparing, contrasting, hypothesizing, organizing, summarizing, and critically evaluating" (Logan et. al 32-3) a broad range of representations. For example, using Foss, we could compare and contrast two songs involving queer characters in terms of differences in approach. We could cluster the themes associated with violence in the music

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videos and lyrics of "Same Love" by Macklemore and Rise Against!'s "Make It Stop" (September's Children) and compare them rhetorically. Rhetorical analysis of media texts provides the potential for "window and mirror opportunities" which Logan et al. define as instances where students are exposed to "new insights" and confronted with connections to their own lives through characters and situations (33).

While I will work to build the media suggestion list over time, I suggest surveying the participant's individual media landscapes through survey or questionnaire before implementing the workshop and providing some constraints for viewing by giving students choices and opportunities to pre-view media before the workshop takes place. Keeping in mind the context, location, and interests of the workshop participants, as the mentor, I would start the first meeting by selecting or giving participants the opportunity to select media material "that discourages false images of queer persons and influences healthy perceptions about sexual orientation and gender expression" (Logan et al 33). I suggest that selection and analysis of media texts is most productive when undertaken with the goal of challenging students to explore the question of where the boundaries lie in constructing respectful narrative. Participants can encourage each other to vary their experiences with media through suggestions and raising awareness of lived

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realities and interpretations that shape the way we view media examples. It is important to analyze and view representations of queer life on a spectrum in order to fully understand how they impact our identities and the larger community, remembering that depictions are problematic, not solely negative or positive. As an essential part of the workshop, students will learn to support reasonable interpretations of texts through examples from within the media example and the outside world; through writing and the media map, we will blend different modes of communication as we construct our responses to the texts we seek to analyze. The media map will assisting in problematizing queer representations by allowing us to visualize rhetorical and thematic connections using Foss's methods and allowing us to chart how representations have been constructed over time. As part of understanding the full context of representations, the media map will also help to demonstrate how media creators have shifted their envisioned target audiences. For example, a participant could suggest an older media text (e.g. *Will and Grace*) to reflect upon how queer people were represented to the larger heterosexual audience in the past and compare the representation of queer males to a modern media text (e.g. *Modern Family*). The organizational structure set by Foss begins by first comparing the key terms, their clusters, the fantasy-themes, characters, settings, actions, and ideologies. The goal of collaborative rhetorical analysis would be the encouragement of analyzing

media more deeply and discussing the steps and approaches that might create more respectful, complex narratives, characters, storylines, and dialogues.

Through in-workshop and optional digital responses, students will be challenged to reflect critically on media using common forms of digital communication. Making use of the workshop's Tumblr page, visual map, and connecting the students' private social media networks (if they would like) will foster a deeper integration and understanding of media to encourage comfort in digital environments requiring different levels of technical literacies. As students spend time thinking about their media networks over the course of the workshop, we will visually trace out symbolic and thematic connections between media depictions as a (digital) visual media map. Students will be granted access to the visual media map and the Tumblr page as sources for outside support (given that they are allowed unsupervised Internet access if they are not yet "out of the closet"). In addition, depending on the number of attendees who join the workshop, the participants and I will produce one or two collaborative projects during our meeting time, with me collaborating to create materials with students as well as providing technical support if necessary. The collaborative project(s) will challenge students to construct a digital or theatrical response that addresses an

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existing media text that we've looked at through the workshop, for example rewriting a script and performing, recording and editing a review podcast or video; writing a scene inspired by a media text; or creating a series of blog posts that analyze particular texts.

Workshop Expansion & Improvement

Buffalo, New York has a visible queer community, providing a prime geographic location for this type of workshop. It cannot be assumed, however that although a queer community may be "visible" in a larger community, acceptance is guaranteed on an individual basis. While "visibility" does not also promise solidarity on all fronts within the LGBTQIA+ community, queer youth in Buffalo are offered resources through newspapers (OUTcome Buffalo), community events (Pride Week), college nights at Club Marcella (for attendees 18+) and local organizations and programs dedicated to educating of queer young adults within the university and the community. Consideration of how to build a comfortable community would vary from location to location, particularly dependent on the level of visibility that the consensus of participating students would hope to achieve; if certain students are made uncomfortable by the low or high level of visibility dictated by the consensus, they may feel pressure to leave and discontinue participation with the workshop and their peers. This isolation of participating students

(instead of inclusion) would speak to a level of undesired alienation within the workshop and would demand possibilities for revision to remedy and move toward achieving a true sense of supportive community that doesn't inspire fear or hesitation by the participants. The implications of holding such a workshop in a less accepting public environment, even one that perhaps has a partnership with a university, are much different from holding the workshop in a place that is founded on acceptance with the aim and possibility of encouraging engagement with the larger public. Because the workshop is designed to be held in a location that provides particular technological resources and support, it is imperative to consider how the content, projects, goals, and objectives would be changed if the location were to change geographically or to a site with fewer resources. Equally, if the surrounding environment was less friendly to LGBTQIA+ individuals, had a less visible queer population and fewer external supportive resources, these factors would need to be weighed in terms of constructing and suggesting materials for the workshop.

Taking inspiration from university-community partnerships, the implementation of the workshop does not mandate a partnership with a university or its representatives; an individual versed in media analysis with a working knowledge of visually literate practices could duplicate and revise

the workshop to meet the needs of particular communities in a variety of spaces (for example, it would be possible to hold the workshop in a center without technological resources, given that participants had the means to view media through their own personal technologies). In fact, prospective mentors must prepare for skepticism or negotiation when approaching potential community partners. In dealing with "the complexity of creating viable, mutually beneficial community-university partnerships" (Mathieu 86), community partnerships often become the victims of partnerships that lack a sense of true reciprocity by forgetting about the "community" aspect once the semester comes to a close for the university participants; as a mentor independent of the university without a mandated curriculum, I am allowed the freedom to experiment and formulate workshop plans in a way that caters specifically to the wishes of the participants. Implementation of this workshop would ideally be by a mentor who seeks to encourage queer youth to envision themselves as active participants in a digital media landscape rather than passive observers of depictions around them. With accessibility to digital media constantly shifting and improving, queer youth that seek support from community settings would benefit from aspects of modes of critique associated with the university, especially in community programs that seek to prepare youth for the university setting.

Guided sessions and discussions about rhetorical theory and visual media critique provide the foundation for the 15-week workshop proposed here, but the workshop can be scaled and altered as necessary. For the organization of the workshop, I've suggested two shows, two songs, and three films as the starting point for the mentor. It would be difficult yet not impossible to transform the suggested workshop into a diversity studies class or class that has a greater population of heterosexual students than those that identify as queer. In each version of the workshop, alterations will have to be made based on the knowledge, perceptions, experiences, understandings, and acceptance of queer as a spectrum.

Contribution to Community and Field & Conclusion

In the first few minutes of the documentary, *Bridegroom*, Shane Bitney Crone shares the narrative of how he came to terms with his homosexuality: as a young boy, he snuck down to his living room and watched *Philadelphia* without his mother's permission. As a result, for the first few years of his life, Crone was convinced that being gay meant that he had AIDS and that he was dying. Years of this type of thinking impacted Shane so deeply that, as he got older, he would call the ambulance in a panic and insist that he was about to die. After years of therapy and coming to terms with his sexuality,

Crone's anxiety over his identity continued to impact the way he perceived himself. As this story demonstrates, media representations of queer individuals have a deep potential for influencing queer youth to perceive themselves as diseased, or worthy of a musical duet (as was the case for me with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). This workshop provides the perfect space to discuss the representations that have shaped us, causing us to take steps or leaps out of the metaphorical closet. For queer youth, the benefits of belonging to a media analysis workshop are great; not only is a support system provided, but participants are encouraged to engage in critical thinking, build media skills, and collaborate with others whose expertise may differ from their own. By signing up for the workshop, participants will acknowledge that they are committed to learning about the evolving forms of media around them and develop personal investment by recognizing what is at stake when support is not constructed. The digital and face-to-face support systems encouraged by the workshop have large implications beyond making youth feel included; when a participant walks into the workshop, they should know that their efforts will be appreciated, their voice and well-supported interpretations will be heard, they'll have a chance to prepare for entry to college classes, and they will not be persecuted for being themselves. Queer youth without support systems that have misguided understandings of queer

representations are at risk for developing unhealthy interpretations (as with Crone in *Bridegroom*), which could lead to embodied homophobia or worse.

Media and social norms are not static. It is important to analyze current and historical visual representations of LGBTQIA+ and their allies in order to interpret the trends of media landscapes and how we can work to understand the way they contribute to the embrace or rejection of aspects of queer identity for LGBTQIA+ individuals and the larger heterosexual public. Through rhetorically informed and visually literate responses and critique, shared through digital social media sites, the participants and I will work toward encouraging deeper, more thoughtful reflection about different kinds of LGBTQIA+ media texts and their repercussions and effects. With the range of students that come to GLYS, my own personal interest in popular culture, and an open, collaborative and safe environment for discussion of issues of community and identity, the workshop has the potential to make important strides towards cultivating individual and collective responsibility to become active viewers with stronger, more confident voices.

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Suggestions for Workshop Schedule

- **Suggested Duration**: 15 Weekly Meetings, Three (3) Hours Each

The length of a traditional university semester is used as the time frame for the suggested workshop schedule in order to scaffold enough time to thoroughly consider and discuss the intersections of social situations, rhetorical analysis, and digital media. I provide suggestions for the weekly viewing schedule for the workshop and a summary of the activities and focuses of each session. Flexibility is encouraged in replication of this workshop but this example is meant to ground the project with a prospective plan for implementation. The need/desire for review and communal media viewing according to participant request needs to be considered in implementation. A visual map to chart the terms, themes, ideologies, and rhetorical considerations of analyzed texts to be constructed by the participants throughout the workshop is recommended to establish continuity in analytical considerations across the selected media examples.

Weeks One – Five

Week One : Introduction & Charting the Rules

- Analytical Focus: Envisioning Rhetorical Analysis

- Discussion: Labels & Identifications

- Activity: Setting the Rules Together & Discussing Analysis/Designing the Map

- Texts: LGBTQIA+ Print Ads, "Break Free" by Ruby Rose (Youtube), Using Twitter and Digital Media: FTM Magazine & Jason Robert Ballard

The first meeting of the workshop is crucial to establishing a comfortable discussion environment. As a group, we will begin with introductions and an icebreaker activity to facilitate voluntary identifications of identity. We will establish a code of conduct for discussions and discuss respect for the views of others. The first suggested rule, set to establish an inclusive dynamic for the workshop, is that self-asserted identities will be respected (i.e. a trans* person will not be questioned, pronouns will be respected, a lesbian who also identifies with occasional bisexual tendencies will not be pressured to "pick an identity and stick with it").

Using the explanations of Sonja Foss (via mentor support, definition worksheet, or visual map), we will identify and give names to concepts that attendees may have already encountered through previous experience with digital media each day. We will conceptualize Foss's terms of "rhetoric," (3)

"symbols," (4) "communication" (5), "rhetorical criticism" (6), "acts and artifacts" (6) through the suggested media examples. Print ads or short Youtube clips are suggested as the media samples for the first session as they provide sites for independent rhetorical analysis as an introduction, rather than jumping into larger texts (unless advertisements are connected through a media campaign). We will talk through the steps of "doing rhetorical criticism" by "analyzing the artifact" (10) and compiling research questions to discover the ideologies and meanings within the artifact (11). We'll interpret Foss's "writing the essay" (13) through discussion, a writing prompt, and by listing examples of potential acts (coming out videos, role model action in the queer community, the *It Gets Better Project*) and artifacts (films, television shows, songs, etc.) to analyze throughout the workshop. Potential topics of discussion include those that integrate the examples with communication practices or examine each of the examples for subtle and overt symbols directed towards the queer community.

We'll begin to touch on digital media activism and use a local example of bringing awareness to issues in the community by looking at the media work of Jason Robert Ballard, a trans activist from Rochester, New York. We'll discuss Ballard's work with Self Made Men (a company he started to provide resources for transmen), FTM magazine (a magazine he launched as

another resource for transmen) and his viral photo shoot with fellow

transman Aydian Dowling. Ballard's activism will serve as evidence that,

with cultivated skills, effort, and analysis of media strategies, media

presence, visual literacy, and persistence can pay off and create positive

changes for the community on a local and global scale. By focusing on an

activist who is local to Western New York and highlighting his exceptional

graphic design skills, we will set the foundation of the workshop on exploring

a lived experience and shines a spotlight on the impact of media across a

wide community. Although proficiency with media tools is not mandated as a

prerequisite for the workshop, I seek to encourage participants to find

comfort in experimenting with new technologies by focusing on Ballard's

work in this session.

Week Two: Community Considerations

- Analytical Focus: Cluster Criticism (Foss)

- Discussion: What is Community?

- Text/Artifact: *Shameless* (2011, TV-MA, Clips available on Youtube)

- Characters: Ian Gallagher (portrayed by Cameron Monaghan), Mickey
  Milkovich (portrayed by Noel Fisher)

- Potential Themes for Analytical Focus: Community, Working Class
  Life, Masculinity, Male Sexuality, Sexual Fluidity, Mental Illness

We'll review Sonja Foss's description of the procedures of Burkean cluster criticism in order to demonstrate the importance of organizing the repeated themes and symbols of your artifact; this is meant for larger texts (i.e. films, television shows, songs) rather than smaller texts (i.e. individual print ads). We will ask questions about the meanings of community, activism, and responsibility as a member of the local and larger queer community.

With *Shameless* as the example for this session, potential topics include the roles of class and community with the characters and romantic relationship of Ian Gallagher and Mickey Milkovich. We will discuss and map the ways in which the symbols intersect and cluster around this example, with a focus on how community and class dynamics come into play along with setting, character, and action to prepare for fantasy-theme critique, and begin examining ideologies of class within the show (Foss 213) and how this comes into play with Mickey and Ian's relationship. Using cluster criticism, we'll identify and chart the influence of terms associated with key terms or themes within the show. We could compare the portrayal of a gay identity in Chicago to our lived experiences as young people in a different, distinct community. After envisioning the show through these analytical lenses, we'll discuss the implications of the characters and the potential impact of storyline shifts (i.e. could Mickey and Ian be considered role models for the

queer community as their characters exist on the show? What if Mickey's father accepted him?).

Week Three: Community & Responsibility

- Analytical Focus: Fantasy Theme Criticism (Foss)

- Discussion: Community, Responsibility, Eloquent Response

- Text/Artifact: *Orange Is The New Black* (2013, TV-MA, Netflix)

- Characters: Sophia Burset (portrayed by Laverne Cox), Nicky Nicholls (portrayed by Natasha Lyonne), Poussey (portrayed by Samira Wiley), Piper Chapman (portrayed by Taylor Schilling), Alex Vause (portrayed by Laura Prepon)

- Potential Themes for Analytical Focus: Camaraderie, Trans* Issues, Sexual Fluidity, Parenthood, Religion, Race, Class Identification, and Context

We'll review Sonja Foss's description and procedures borrowed from Ernest Bormann's method of fantasy-theme criticism. I suggest using *Orange is the New Black* as the media example for this session in order to facilitate discussion and chart the clusters surrounding the themes of camaraderie, race, and queer as well as opening the floor to suggestions from the participants for other cluster and fantasy themes that contemplate the rhetorical vision or "the interpretation of reality" (100) that informs the

construction of the show. Integrating the methods and organization of cluster criticism, we can organize the fantasy themes into clusters and form the rhetorical vision for the artifact (Season One, Episode Three, for example), building off of existing understanding of rhetorical criticism. We will carefully analyze an episode or clips from *Orange is the New Black* and consider the fantasy-themes constructed by what happens behind the scenes of and throughout the show (i.e. respectful transnarrative through casting and director choice, camaraderie and race in a prison setting).

Week Four: Applying Multiple Modes of Critique

- Analytical Focus: Ideological Criticism (Foss)

- Historical Overview (Harvey Milk, context for songs)

- Texts/Artifacts: Music & Rhetoric: "Same Love" by Macklemore (2012, Youtube) & "Make It Stop" by Rise Against! (2011,Youtube); *Milk* (2008, R, DVD) & Milk's "Give 'Em Hope Speech" (1978, text available online)

- Collaborative Rhetorical Analysis (Suggestion: Blend all styles of criticism)

- Potential Themes for Analytical Focus: Activism, Politics, Community Action

Songs, considered as independent examples or as parts of an album, and speeches, considered independently or as part of a campaign, are suggested for this session to increase the number of modes of texts with Foss's work on ideological criticism at the forefront. By incorporating different types of texts for analyses, students have the chance to expand their visual literacy and learn about texts that evolve rapidly. Looking at the music videos and lyrics for "Same Love" by Macklemore and "Make It Stop" by Rise Against! as well as Harvey Milk's "Give 'Em Hope Speech," we will work through constructing ideological criticism according to Foss's guidelines while considering cluster and fantasy themes that arise and/or contribute to the ideologies of violence, alliance, and/or transcendence and how queer voices are represented within musical artifacts (220). We'll discuss the contexts of the songs and the speech to ensure that all participants understand the rhetorical situation of each act.

Week Five: Alliance & Media Response

- Text/Artifact: *The Laramie Project* (2002, TV-14, HBOGo)
- Potential Themes for Analytical Focus: Humanity, Community Action, Alliance

We will view *The Laramie Project* as part of our reflection on what being an ally means and where responsibility stands in relationship to

community. The portrayal of Laramie, Wyoming, by a collection of actors brings into question different perspectives of truth, awareness of hate crime, and questions of the media's reporting of hate crimes and provides an opportunity to span several media categories (for example, can be paired with the play by Moisés Kaufman and members of the Tectonic Theater Project and/or its theatrical representations).

As part of the example schedule, this workshop could open the floor for students to discuss their concepts of safety within the community as queer people and how the media portrays queer safety as queer characters are made visible.

Weeks Six to Twelve, and Fourteen and Fifteen

During weeks six to 12 and in week 14, the workshop will incorporate participant suggestions for media selections. They can include a broad range of texts but the focus should be on community and identity. For example, local newspapers or flyers could be just as relevant as media examples for the workshop as films, television shows, or songs. Collaborative and individual responses are optional in the workshop to remove the pressures of work load and deadlines. Students who would like to compile digital responses will be given the option to work on one larger collaborative project or two smaller collaborative projects, both with four joint work sessions on-premises,

depending on media resources and the number of participants in the workshop. Digital responses and activities should be encouraged but not mandated. Implementation of writing, presentations, and digital response will depend on participant desire for a product to arise out of the workshop. The mentor will contribute input to digital compositions as a fellow participant.

Week Six

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions
- Optional Collaborative Response Day

Week Seven

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions
- Optional Collaborative Response Wrap-Up/Discussion

Weeks Eight & Nine

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions
- Optional Digital Response/Activity (in-class)

Weeks Ten, Eleven, & Twelve

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions
- Optional Digital Response/Activity (in-class)

Week Thirteen: Fluidity, Spectrum, and Flux of Identity

- Text/Artifact: *Tomboy* (2011, NR, Netflix)

- Activity: Monologue Building Exercise & Writing

I suggest Céline Sciamma's film *Tomboy* as the perfect culminating text for analysis in this workshop as it raises questions of gender fluidity in childhood and community. Aligning with the workshop's dedication to respecting self-identification and viewing queer and gender on a spectrum, this text will give students a chance to contemplate the implications of safety, comfort, acceptance, and how trans issues impact various age groups (child? teen? adult?) in various communities (amongst friends? In the home? with the larger public?) and how individual responses to media and our communities shape the way we perceive our identities from childhood on.

Week Fourteen: Approaching the Close of the Workshop

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions

- Optional Collaborative Response Day

Week Fifteen: Closing

- Participant Text/Artifact suggestions

- Collaborative Response Wrap-Up

- Community Potluck & Discussion

- Optional Presentations of Collaborative Responses/Projects

Suggestions: Further Examples of Media Texts, Warnings, and Topics for Analysis

As a participant, I would suggest the following texts, acts, and representations because of my familiarity with them, their availability online, and their influence as queer media texts in historical and contemporary contexts. Foss's modes of critique could be applied to each of these examples in creative ways, as demonstrated in the potential themes for analysis in the film and television movies section.

Films & TV Movies

The Birdcage (1996, R, Available on Netflix)

Starring Robin Williams and Nathan Lane as gay partners who own a popular Florida drag club, this Oscar-nominated comedy features musical interludes and Hank Azaria as a gay butler who aspires to be a famous drag queen and raises questions about gay stereotypes, the drag community, and the meaning of family.

Potential Topics for Analysis

- Cluster criticism: Constructing a meaning of family based on key and clustering themes/terms
- Fantasy-theme criticism: The drag community in *The Birdcage* (chart the settings, characters, and actions that support a rhetorical worldview constructed by the film)

Warnings

- Suggestive content, explicit language

Blue is the Warmest Color (2013, NC-17, Available on Netflix)

Based on Julie Maroh's graphic novel, *Blue is the Warmest Color* is a French film that follows Adèle (in the novel, Clementine) as she grows up and explores her sexuality. Adèle falls in love with a young blue-haired artist named Emma (portrayed by Léa Seydoux). Abedllatif Kechiche's dramatic film stands at three hours long but is available on Netflix for private viewing. Paired with the graphic novel, this text provides two media for analysis.

Potential Topics for Analysis

- Cluster criticism: Shades of blue in *Blue is the Warmest Color* (use of blue as a symbol throughout the film)

- Fantasy-theme criticism: Fluid Desire in *Blue is the Warmest Color* (charting the setting, characters, actions surrounding Adèle's exploration of her identity)

- Ideological criticism: Community (forming an ideology based on the film or novel's portrayal of the community)

Warnings

- Strong sexual content

Boys Don't Cry (1999, R, Available on Netflix)

　　Boys Don't Cry is an Oscar-award winning film, directed by Kimberly Peirce based on the true story of Brandon Teena (portrayed by Hilary Swank). Born a biological female, Brandon asserts his masculinity and falls in love with a young woman named Lana (portrayed by Chloë Sevigny) in Nebraska; the film portrays his family as intolerant of his identity. Brandon's involvement with Lana's group of friends ultimately leads him down a dangerous and criminal path. Brandon's story comes alive in a way that is both compelling and very direct.

Potential Topics for Analysis

Halberstam's work on the transgender gaze can be integrated when discussing this film; it specifically focuses on *Boys Don't Cry.*

- The implications of trans* stories conveyed by a female actress (casting choices)
- Fantasy-theme criticism: Class and *Boys Don't* Cry, Nebraska as setting
- Cluster criticism: Romance in transnarrative (key terms/themes and clustering terms/themes relating to the film's commentary on Brandon and Lana's romance)

Warnings

- Rape, Transphobia, Graphic content, Murder, Nudity, Sexual content

Bridegroom (2013, R, Available on Netflix)

This documentary explores the six-year long relationship between Shane Bitney Crone and his fiancé Tom Bridegroom that abruptly ended when Tom died in a tragic accident. In demonstrating how Tom's family refuses to acknowledge Shane's place in Tom's life, director Linda Bloodworth-Thomason demonstrates the importance of protecting the rights

of LGBTQI people and how media played a role in creating memories for the couple, as much of the footage of Tom comes from his and Shane's own personal videos and photographs.

Possible Topics for Analysis

- Documentary and queer narratives
- Media influence in acknowledging queer relationships
- Ideological criticism: Formulating an ideology based on the portrayal of Shane's removal from Tom's history

Warnings

- Graphic content, homophobia

But I'm a Cheerleader (1999, R, Available on Netflix)

Directed by Jamie Babbit, this comedy focuses on a cheerleader who struggles with being a lesbian and is sent to a rehab camp meant to teach her how to be heterosexual. Featuring RuPaul, Clea DuVall, and Natasha Lyonne (known for *Orange is the New Black*), this older film questions gender norms and satirizes stereotypes and myths about LGBTQIA+ through a narrative that sheds spotlight on the ridiculousness of conversion therapy.

Potential Topics for Analysis

- Ideological criticism: Comedy & Stereotypes, Gender norms (formulate an ideology based on the film's comedic representation of queer stereotypes; unveil the gender norms commented on throughout the film to form the gendered ideology approached by the film)

- Fantasy-theme criticism: Comedy as Real-World Reflection (charting the settings, actions, and characters that add comedy to real-world issues surrounding queer, can bring in the context of 1999)

Warnings

- Sexual content, nudity

Television Shows

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003, TV-14, Available on Netflix)

A series that focuses on a California valley girl turned vampire slayer, *Buffy* incorporates a lesbian storyline with one of its main characters and questions gender norms throughout the show. Joss Whedon, the show's principal writer, is known for ….

Broad City (2014-, TV-14, Available on Amazon Prime)

Faking It (2014-, NR, Available on MTV.com)

The L Word (2004-2009, TV-MA, Available on Netflix and Amazon Prime)

Modern Family (2009 -, TV-PG, some seasons available on Hulu)

Six Feet Under (2001-2005, TV-MA, Available on HBOGo and Amazon Prime)

Web-Based/Social Texts, Acts, and Artifacts

Coming Out Videos on Youtube

LGBTQIA+ Activist Blogs, Posts, Tumblrs, Images

The It Gets Better Project

Songs & Queer Topics in Music

LGBTQIA+ Pillars in the Larger Community

Local Acts/Artifacts

Local activist social media accounts, newspapers, center documents, advertisements, photographs, pamphlets

Suggestions for Collaborative Activities

The following activities are suggested with the aim to cultivate visual literacy and comfort with technology through digital media experimentation. Depending on the resources provided at the community center, personal technologies, and student computer privileges (i.e. process will be impacted if students are closeted and activity is monitored), the activities below serve as models that could be flexed if necessary; they are the starting points for potential responses that incorporate writing and the use of media.

Activity One: Collaborative Response

Using the technologies at your disposal, create a representation based on a "coming out" narrative with a particular audience in mind. Your audience could include someone who you have not told about your identity/sexuality, or the piece could be a self-exploratory one where you

explore your coming out. Although this assignment does not include

giving/presenting your representation to the audience it was constructed for,

you *must* include specific material and reflect upon why you would construct

your representation in a particular way.

Some examples of potential representations could include:

- A visual essay inspired by a letter addressed to a parent/guardian or friend

- An "it gets better" video that explores identity and relates to the stories of others

- A reflective collage of your images that explores aspects of your identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community

- A 10-minute play that explores being "out" to a particular person and what that could mean

- An "it gets better" PowerPoint about your understanding of identity that seeks to engage others through interesting and captivating use of images, sounds, and creativity.

Activity Two: Collaborative Reflection (Environments for Social Change)

Using aspects of the local community, explore some of the issues, strengths, weaknesses, or possibilities for improvement, with one of the following projects.

As a group, you have the choice to either

- devise a ten minute-play,

- design an age-appropriate educational hour-long workshop

- formulate a webpage, pamphlet, or brochure

- write and edit a blogpost about the local/global community

where you explore issues and the meaning of LGBTQIA+ community or issues that arise as members of the younger LGBTQIA+ community specifically.

Your project can pertain to health issues, building a community, the difference between acceptance and tolerance, media depictions, overcoming stereotypes, overcoming hatred, building a family, living with a non-traditional gender expression, creating an understanding of a particular

identity (or identities) in an engaging way but it is not limited to these possibilities.

In putting together your group project, consider:

- What issues can you each relate to as group members because of your individual identities?

- What age group do you plan to design your project for?

- What would the purpose of your project be?

- What is present or lacking in the community for queer individuals that relates to your project?

If your group would like to propose an alternative medium to present the project, that is fine – just let the mentor know!

Activity 3: Individual Response

Write a letter to your 13-year-old self, think back about what you were reading and doing and give yourself advice for navigating through the next few years. Keep social media's influence in mind.