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Reel Queer: Emergent Discourses and Contexts of Queer Youth Identity Constructions and Experiences in Digital Video Projects

Sarah Lindsey Beck

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Sarah Lindsey Beck
Candidate

Communication and Journalism
Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Dr. David Weiss, Chairperson

Dr. Judith White

Dr. Myra Washington

Dr. Adriana Ramirez de Arellano

REEL QUEER:
EMERGENT DISCOURSES AND CONTEXTS OF
QUEER YOUTH IDENITY CONSTRUCTIONS AND
EXPERIENCES IN DIGITAL VIDEO PROJECTS

by

SARAH LINDSEY BECK

B.A. COMMUNICATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2012

B.A. THEATER, FILM AND DANCE
HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY, 2010

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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the discourses present in digital video projects created by queer youth, ages 13-20, who participated in The Reel Queer Youth video mentorship program between 2009 and 2012. I used textual analysis, specifically discourse and critical technocultural discourse analysis to explore constructions of identity in youth and experiences present in digital video projects and the contexts these discourses were produced within.

I identified three overarching discursive themes: (a) call for more complex understandings of queer youth identities and experiences; (b) concern regarding gender binaries; and (c) change and self-responsibility. In addition to the discursive themes, I identified and discussed four contextualizing elements. The elements consist of: (a) culture, the larger media discourses concerning the experiences of queer youth; (b) environment, the RQY video production workshop where the videos were produced; (c) production, the actual production process needed to produce a digital video project; and (d) platform, Vimeo, the video sharing site that hosts the RQY videos. I placed the themes and contextualizing elements identified into conversation with each other. I was

able to identify four conversations: (a) sexual and gender identity labels; (b) unspoken

discourses: reinforcing queer universality; (c) cyberqueer materiality and technolcultural

space; and (d) queer technological progress. These conversations reveal that culture and

environment had an impact on what how the youth conceptualize and construct gender

and sexual identities, as well as what discourses are silenced. Production and platform

influence what is actually able to be captured and shared through the use of digital video,

while platform affects who can access the videos and the potential negative ramifications

of making the RQY videos public.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My thesis examines the discourses present in digital video projects created by queer youth, ages 13-20, who participated in a video mentorship program between 2009 and 2012. I will identify themes and patterns present within the texts, as well as contextualizing elements, in order to gain a deeper understanding of contemporary queer youth experiences as expressed through digital video projects.   In addition to examining discourses produced by this particular group of teens, I will investigate the role that technology, in the form of digital video, plays in the construction and performance of queer identity. This chapter introduces the experiences of queer youth, the Reel Queer Youth Video Mentorship Program, and justifications for the study.

Contemporary Queer Youth

Queer[1] youth often are denied access to the public language and resources needed to articulate their desires, needs, and experiences (Shelton, 2008). Because of their age and marginalized position, queer youth don't always have the means, skills, or abilities to share or see their experiences reflected in dominant discourses and representations such as TV shows, films, young adult books, journalistic reports, and medical and psychological journals. Queer youth face additional challenges that their straight peers have the privilege of avoiding. They are forced to operate in a world that imposes strict gender and sexuality binaries, may be faced with negative public rhetoric about their orientation being immoral, sick, or unnatural, face a future where they may not have the

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[1] I am using *queer* as a broad umbrella term for sexuality and gender minorities. Identities that fall under this umbrella include but are not limited to: lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, transgender, gender queer, gender non conforming, and intersex.

same rights as their peers, and often contend with physical and psychological dangers to their well-being based only on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Despite these challenges, queer youth today are resilient and generally at ease with their sexual orientation and identity (Savin-Williams, 2005). Today's queer youth are breaking away from traditional labels and notions of gender identity and sexual orientation and creating new words to better reflect their experiences and represent their lived realities. Margot Adler (2013), a correspondent for National Public Radio (NPR), reported the phenomenon of young people today challenging traditional categories such as gay, lesbian, and transgender in favor of more fluid identities that resist binary understandings. Adler spoke with high school and college students as well as adults who identified as queer or worked with the queer community. Adler reflected on an experience she had while giving a talk at a college campus where students introduced themselves by name followed by their preferred gender pronouns, or PGPs. Her first reaction was that the whole experience felt cult-like and unnecessary. Adler later spoke with the director of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender center for homeless youth who argued that the kids' use of PGP language was actually a way of challenging and resisting normative gender categories and assumptions.   Lynn Walker, the director of a LGBTQ housing organization, was also interviewed for the piece. She was quoted (in Alder, 2013) saying, "We encountered high school students who said, I want you to call me Tractor and use pronouns like zee, zim and zer. And, in fact, I reject the gender binary as an oppressive move by the dominant culture." Walker also reflected on young people feeling uneasy in spaces that were sex-segregated. When asked about innovation being driven by young people, Joy Ladin, a transgender author quoted by Adler (2013), stated,

"And we say, oh, you know, they're pushing the boundaries, they're exploring new ways of being. All of that is true. But part of what enables them to do that is that they're not really sure yet where they are going."

Even if queer youth are unsure where they are going or what the final result of their identity journeys will be, young queer individuals are questioning the groundwork laid by gay, lesbian, and transgender activists who came before them. Queer youth today are demanding to be heard and are using technologies such as digital cameras and the Internet to insert themselves into public discourse. They are taking to YouTube to distribute video diaries of their transitions and experimentations in gender identity and to upload videos of themselves secretly recording coming out to their parents and being met with positive reactions and support. As an adult volunteer at a youth group for queer teens, I have noticed that teens seem to be coming out at younger ages than they were when I was in high school and are unapologetic about their identities. Even though the kids in the group speak about being bullied at school, their parents not understanding their fluid pansexual identities, getting kicked out of foster homes for being gay, and having to go to rehab for depression and anxiety, they share as many if not more positive stories and experiences, such as finding support from school faculty and classmates, building new relationships and friendships, and feeling free to not hide aspects of their identities. Queer youth today are not allowing themselves to go unseen. Passing is not necessarily the goal for teens today as wider social acceptance has grown for non-normative sexualities. New media technologies, such as digital video and the ability to upload it to the Internet, have allowed teens to become part of the larger public conversation about sexuality and queer gender identity.

Reel Queer Youth and Video Mentorship Projects

Multimedia video projects can be effective means of giving queer youth opportunities for self-expression, as well as being tools for understanding and shedding light on their experiences, needs, and desires (Driver, 2007). Queer youth are expressing themselves and participating in the discourse about queer youth experiences, such as romantic relationships, bullying, and coming out, by producing digital video projects with the help and support of community-based video mentorship projects. These projects offer queer youth the opportunity to meet other queer youth, develop media literacy skills, and learn how to create their own media texts using professional equipment (with the help of professional media producers). The organization that I will be focusing on for this thesis is Reel Queer Youth.

Reel Queer Youth (RQY) is a video production and media literacy training program for LGBTQ youth ages 13-20 and their allies. RQY is sponsored by the organization Three Dollar Bill Cinema in partnership with Reel Grrls located in Seattle, Washington (Three Dollar Bill, n.d.). Three Dollar Bill Cinema's mission is to strengthen, connect, and reflect diverse communities through queer film and media. In addition to Reel Queer Youth, the organization sponsors several film festivals throughout the year. Reel Grrls is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering young women through media production. It offers workshops year- round to girls in the Seattle area (Reel Grrls, n.d.).

The Reel Queer Youth program takes place for one week every year. The participants work in teams under the guidance of professional filmmakers to create short digital videos. In the 2013 RQY promotional video an unnamed participant stated, "I

think it's incredibly important to be with other queer people intergenerationally. I think it's an amazing opportunity…the chance to collaborate with other youth and to create something that is a catharsis for whatever experiences they're going through." RQY has made several of the completed projects available for public viewing on their website. The videos range in style from non-fiction pieces to superhero stories, from funny to serious. "No Homo" is a music video featuring three girls rapping about their sexual identities and stereotypes, "Reel Life" is a montage of medium close- ups of individuals talking about their experiences and sexual identities, "Paranoia" is a dark suicide-prevention piece, and "Cherry Bomb" takes us back to Katy Perry's high school days and imagines a story focusing on the girl who inspired her hit song "I Kissed a Girl." (Appendix A contains a summary of all 11 videos).

There are no demographics made available to the public about RQY participants by either Reel Grrls or Three Dollar Bill Cinema. The registration information for the summer 2013 session indicates that the fee for participating in the program is a suggested $295, but that no one is ever turned away because of their inability to pay, so no assumptions can be made about participants' financial status (Reel Grrls, n.d.). It is unclear how many participants identify as people of color. In the video "I Am Me," two participants self-identify as Chinese and Latina, and several of the participants in various videos appear to be people of color, but the majority of the participants are or can be read as white. There is also no information available about how participants identify regarding gender and sexual identity. In the video "Reel Life," participants self-identified as bisexual, straight, queer, homoflexible, pansexual, and questioning. "I Am Me"

employs the identity labels gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, ally, pansexual, intersex, and queer. The other film that uses labels includes many non-binary gender identities such as butch, genderqueer, trigender, agender, tomboy/boi, and genderfluid. It is important to acknowledge that the title of the program employs the word *queer* rather than the LGBTQIA[2] acronym or the words *gay, lesbian, transgender*, etc. By using the word *queer* the program potentially draws participants who align themselves more strongly with or have knowledge concerning non-binary gender and sexual identities. Also, because this program is specifically targeting queer teens it is unlikely that participants are closeted about their gender and sexual identities since the nature of the project requires participants to publicly associate with a queer identity in some way.

Interest and Justification

Driver (2007) called for research that is tied to advocacy for queer youth and provides opportunities for queer youth to engage in creative cultural production. I have chosen to work with queer youth and self-representational media projects for numerous reasons. My interest in this topic stems both from having identified a gap in the literature, as well as my personal experiences as a filmmaker and media producer. First, several research studies (Bloustein, 1998; Driver, 2007; Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010; Rhoades, 2012; Rogers et al., 2010) have documented the experiences of queer youth, or youth who occupy other marginalized positions, who have participated in adult facilitated video mentorship projects. These studies have established that youth in these programs experience opportunities for empowerment and the creation of counter-narratives, but

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[2] LGBTQIA stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer, intersex, and ally.

none of the studies examine the specific discourses that project participants are generating. The current literature provides an in-depth look into the emotional and psychological outcomes of these projects, but there is little information on the actual content emerging. Examining not only what queer teens are saying, but also how they are using the resources and technology made available to them, can offer clues to the experiences, self-concepts, needs, and desires of queer teens. Second, as a media producer who first discovered digital video as a means of self-expression in my late teens, I remember the positive effects that creating video projects had on my own life as I struggled to understand my identity and went through experiences that were not necessarily reflected in the mainstream discourses surrounding me.

My study expands the existing literature and therefore our knowledge in the following ways. First, it contributes to a broader understanding of the discourses and experiences of queer youth. Second, this study has the potential to provide support for self-representations of queer youth to be taken seriously as forms of knowledge about the community. By blurring the youth/adult binary through the agency that I give youth-produced media texts, I am hoping to provide legitimacy for the stories that young people are telling and the experiences they share even though they are not professional media producers or researchers. Third, it is my hope that this study will lead to broader understandings of queer youth experiences and needs. If adults are able to hear first-hand what queer youth want and need, then rather than adults defining challenges and solutions, queer youth themselves can articulate the challenges in their lives and even suggest what solutions will be beneficial to them.

In addition to examining the ways in which queer youth conceptualize, share, and perform their experiences and identities, I am concerned with the role of technology, specifically digital video, in the construction and performance of queer identity. Several scholars (Dasgupta, 2012; Miyake, 2004; Wakeford, 1997) identified with a new field known as cyberqueer studies have examined the role that the Internet has played in queer identity but none have made connections between Internet communities such as websites, blogs, and chatrooms and digital video projects available online, or the role that technology plays in our understanding of queer identity performance. My goal is to expand and critique notions of cyberqueer to include digital video technologies.

Thesis Preview

The interest in my thesis topic grew out of both my personal experience as a media producer as well as an identified gap in existing literature. Chapter two will provide an overview of relevant literature pertaining to discourse, queer identity and theory, cyberqueer studies, contemporary queer youth experiences, critical youth studies and the relationship between adults and youth, and youth self representation through media. Chapter three addresses the methodology used to analyze my data set. Chapter four provides an analysis of my data and places aspects of my analysis into conversation with each other. Finally, chapter five revisits my research questions, discusses the limitations of my thesis, and offers suggestions for ways my project can potentially contribute to future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to identify relevant research for my study of discourses present in queer youth video projects. This literature review draws on Foucault's conceptualization of discourse, queer theory, critical youth studies, and cyberqueer studies. It also discusses discursive power, gender and sexuality, queer identity, queer youth today, self-representation, and the youth/adult binary.

Discourse

Discourse refers to communication practices such as language and visual images that form groups of statements. Statements can be understood as networks of rules that establish what is discursively important (Foucault, 1972). These statements structure what is known about the world and how the world is understood (Rose, 2012). Theorist Michel Foucault conceived discourse as a meaning-making-practice that is generated from within a society itself (Wilchins, 2004). Discourse is a cultural construction that represents a version of reality but is not an exact copy or reproduction of reality, because reality cannot exist outside of discourse. It constructs what is and is not possible to talk about and produces and reproduces structures of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1972).

In addition to producing knowledge, discourse also produces subjects. Subjects are dependent on the discourse that creates them; for example, medical discourse produces doctors, nurses, and patients (Rose, 2012). Without the knowledge produced by medical discourse there would be no knowledge or understanding of what a doctor is or the role, or subject position, that a doctor holds in society. Subject positions determine and constrain individual participation and functions within society (Wooffitt, 2005).

Discourse can be said to have two effects or roles in society that work to regulate and orient the subject positions and objects present within them: (1) they constrict and limit how individuals participate in society because of the subject positions they hold, and (2) they construct objects through the use of specific vocabularies (Wooffitt, 2005).

Discourses do not stand alone, but rather interact and have relationships to one another. Often discourses are present in diverse forms that speak to and about one another; this is referred to as intertextuality. Intertextuality takes into consideration the fact that the meaning of one text or visual image may depend on another text in order for the first text's meaning to be understood (Rose, 2012). An example of intertextuality would be a character in a TV show making a joke about a well-known musical group. In order to understand the humor or irony of the joke it would be crucial to understand the meanings previously attached to the musical group being referenced. Discursive formation is another way of conceptualizing meaning that is present between and within discourses. Discursive formation refers to meanings that are connected to each other through discourse (Rose, 2012). The concepts of homosexuality and heterosexuality can be used to illustrate discursive formations; the contrasting nature of the two concepts is such that one cannot be understood without the other (Butler, 1990).

The contexts from which discourses emerge, or are silenced or not allowed existence, are important in understanding their meanings. The conditions in which expressions exist and are created influence discursive meaning. Discourses are produced and transformed according to complex institutional and representational relationships. The institutional and social sites where statements are made need to be located in order to determine the social authority held by the statement (Foucault, 1972). An individual in a

position of power who has been awarded social authority is more likely to produce statements that are more productive than statements made by individuals occupying marginalized social positions (Rose, 2012). The significance of a discourse is dependent on the context that produces it as well as discourses and ideas that are connected to it (Foucault, 1978).

      Discursive power. Discursive power is the ability that discourse has to create as well as restrain social actors and the roles they play in society. It is productive, and through its use of language and meaning produces certain types of individuals. This power, although hierarchical in the types of subjects it produces, is not top down but rather diffused throughout society; it is not held by a particular individual but is practiced by everyone (Wilchins, 2004). Foucault (1978) understood power as an entity that both controls and prohibits; to Foucault, power manifests itself in different ways at many different locations. Power and knowledge are directly related to one another. There can be no sense of power or authority given to an individual without knowledge about why that individual or institution has been bestowed this authority (Foucault, 1972). A person's self-image is dependent on the transmission of knowledge and discourses that is directed by discursive systems of power.

      Discourse must be generated in order for knowledge to be created. What we know is dependent on how it is talked about and represented (Foucault, 1972). Visibility and invisibility should also be considered discourses. Certain subjects, knowledges, experiences, and identities are made visible in certain ways through language use or specific images. The same is true for rendering invisibility; when subjects or experiences are not included in discourses they become unknowable and unseen (Rose, 2012). This is

important to take into consideration when exploring subjectivities, our internal understanding of ourselves, which is heavily influenced by discourse (Wilchins, 2004). If certain experiences are left out of a discourse, or the subject positions made available through a discourse are narrow and incomplete, then an individual's sense of self cannot be known or expressed completely. For example, if an individual is forced to choose between the binary labels "male" and "female" and there is no discourse that creates options that exist outside of these two categories, then the individual is forced to choose between these options even if neither choice accurately reflects the individual's experiences or sense of self. The lack of discourse available to identify experiences beyond or outside male and female renders these experiences and identities invisible because no discursive knowledge is being produced about alternative options.

Discourses are not set in stone; they have the ability to be flexible, to change, and to adapt (Foucault, 1991). Current discourses and knowledges can be challenged and give way to new forms of knowledge and relationships. Often, changing discourse involves attacking the categories that produce discursive formations of knowledge and subject positions. Wilchins (2004) argues for new forms of politics that challenge the discursive power that dictates that male and female are the only legitimate options to choose from. Wilchins calls for discourse that allows for individuals to exist outside of the sex binary system through changes such as putting an end to practices such as sex assignment at birth, sex-segregated restrooms, and the mandatory declaration of one's assigned sex on legal documents.

Discursive power, gender, and sexuality. Discursive power networks produce knowledges about gender and sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Rodgers, 2009). Subject

positions connected to gender and sexuality are created through discursive power, and the subject is created through the repetition of signifiers that normalize gendered and sexed subject-position roles (Butler, 1990). Gender and sexuality are languages created by systems of meanings that are accompanied by privileges and punishments related to their proper use and misuse (Wilchins, 2004). The cultural practices responsible for the production of gender conformity and norms exist within a discourse. "Discursive power produces specific kinds of individuals, with specific bodies, pleasures, and sexes" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 62).

Male-bodied individuals are expected to identify as men, be masculine, and be romantically and sexually attracted to female-bodied people. Female-bodied people are supposed to identify as women, be feminine, and be attracted to male-bodied people. These assumptions are framed as being natural or real, even though they are in no way stable and have changed and adapted over time and across geographic space. Gender identities that do not adhere to the binary system become incomprehensible. When the expectations linking gender, sex, and attraction are broken or disregarded they become unintelligible because normative discourse only acknowledges the existence of the binary category. Men in dresses or women with buzz cuts still have the potential to make some individuals profoundly uncomfortable. Discourses surrounding gender identity and sexuality are important to consider because they are accepted sets of meanings that allow us to understand ourselves and our relationships to others (Wilchins, 2004).

In *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler (1990) challenges the dominant understanding about the relationship between sex and gender and attempts to create new discourses and knowledges about gender and sexuality. Butler states that gender identity has been made

intelligible through discourses enabled by a cultural matrix that does not allow for certain

types of identities to exist. Gender is not static; rather it is constituted though historical

contexts as well as other identity intersections such as race, class, geographic location,

ethnicity, and sexuality. Butler argues that gender is performative and that both sex and

gender are socially constructed. Gender is the lens that we use to understand the sexed

body. The sexed body cannot exist without gender, and the illusion that sex existed

before the discourse of gender is an effect of the functional role that gender plays.

Gender is always doing, so gender identity does not exist beyond the expressions of

gender. Performance is what creates gender, but there is no original that gender

performance is attempting to imitate. Because gender and sexuality are performative,

man/woman/gay/straight only become recognizable within the context of their

performance (Nealon & Giroux, 2003).

Butler's book *Bodies That Matter* (1993) expands on her arguments about the

discursive nature of gender. Butler seeks to dismantle the sex/gender differentiation,

claiming that they are interdependent of each other, but argues that sex and gender are co-

constructed in relation to each other. In *Bodies That Matter,* Butler claims that the body

can only be known through discourse and language. It is through this discursive

performativity that both gender and sex materialize. In this work Butler speaks about

moments of potential subversion aimed at racial, sexual, and gender norms, but makes the

important point that it is not always clear when an act is subversive or is actually

reinforcing existing power structures.

Queer Identity, Theory, and Criticisms

Queer identities and knowledges are ways of existing in the world that challenge the normative discourse of gender and sexuality. "Homosexuality itself is the most profound transgression of the primary rule of gender" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 16). By transgressing the normative expectations of men engaging in sexual activity only with women and women participating in sex acts only with men, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, and queer individuals have the potential to disrupt gendered, heterosexual expectations.

Queer can be seen as the active disengaging of sex acts from gender, and can include non-normative expressions of both sexual and gender identities (Nealon & Giroux, 2003). Queer allows for non-normative expressions of community and kinship, sexual identity, and embodiment and activity within space and time (Halberstam, 2005). "Queerness is about destabilizing conventional categories, subverting the identities derived from and normalized by heteropatriarchy" (Kanner, 2003, p. 34). Queer operates in opposition to binaries and fixed identities, and is therefore fluid. Queer aims to interrupt expectations and conventions, both as a social performance as well as a lived identity and experience (Kanner, 2003). The constructed nature of gender and sexuality allow for the possibility of subversion and failure. Embracing failure, and failing at gender performance unapologetically in public, not only draws attention to gender's constructed nature, but also creates spaces for alternative knowledges and experiences that have been disregarded and made unseen by normative discourse (Halberstam, 2011; Wilchins, 2004). Queer, as an identity, creates opportunities for alternative life narratives and relationships that operate outside of heteronormative goals and expectations (Halberstam, 2005). Identities that fall under the queer umbrella include

descriptors of sexual as well as gender identity. Queer can encompass identity labels such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, intersex, transgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, and agender, among others.

Queer theory and queer studies bring queer identities into the academy. Queer theory is a post-structuralist theory that grew out of and reacted to feminist and gay and lesbian studies. Queer theory is ultimately political in nature because of its concern with power, language, and identity. (Wilchins, 2004). Queer theory and queer studies within the academy are parts of the larger discipline of identity studies, which often merge social, political, and intellectual engagement. According to Wiegman (2012), identity studies as academic projects seek to describe and improve the social value of difference; building on this, Kafer (2013) states, "queer theorists are committed to forging a politics that does not marginalize, normalize, or criminalize queer bodies, practices or desires" (p. 23). Queer theory differs from gay and lesbian studies, which can be viewed as a project in the recovering of minority history and silenced voices, whereas queer theory's larger project is to challenge concepts of binary categorization and to offer and integrate alternative ways of being and existing in the social world (Halberstam, 2005; Piontek, 2006).

Piontek (2006) argues that the institutionalization of gay and lesbian studies through the academy should be open to criticism; indeed, in order for gay and lesbian studies to thrive in the twenty first century it must be queered. Piontek differentiates between queer theory's interrogation of normative ways of being and the assumption that queer theory simply merged with gay and lesbian studies to create queer studies. Piontek positions queer studies as an inclusive, politically positioned form of identity

studies that has the potential to address gay and lesbian studies' exclusions of other forms of sexuality and to propel knowledge production forward.

Morton (1995) situates queer theory as occupying a "postgay" and "postlesbian" space. The author argues that queer can be viewed as embracing "the latest fashion over an older, square style by the hip generation" (p. 369). Contemporary queer studies can be viewed as making radical advancements over modernist gay and lesbian studies and its conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Morton argues that queer theory operates within a framework of ludic (post)modernism that supersedes enlightenment as an idealism that breaks away from historic materialism. The author claims that this idealism becomes highlighted when queer is seen in relationship with late capitalist developments such as virtual realities, cybersex, and cyberpunk, situating queer in a postmodern, mediated landscape that is disconnected from its gay and lesbian past.

While authors such as Morton (1995) and Piontek (2006) position queer as a future oriented project, Wiegman (2012) is distrustful of situating identity labels and projects such as gender and queer studies as the definitive answer to gay and lesbian studies' shortcomings. Wiegman (2012) argues that queer studies is embedded in political aspirations that differ from that of gay and lesbian studies, and is often seen as the answer to queer sexualities and intersex experiences that gay and lesbian as identity categories potentially exclude. She claims that queer and gender studies will eventually fail in their political aspirations and be replaced with yet other identity project labels.

Wiegman (2012) is not the only author to be leery of queer theory. Other theorists have interrogated queer theory for its separation from the body, allowing the body to become completely discursive and not allowing for material bodily experiences

to be taken into account. Ann Fausto-Sterling (2000) asks when the social becomes the material. Fausto-Sterling criticizes feminist theorists for viewing the body as mere scaffolding that discourse and performance are built upon. She argues that gender cannot be understood through a single lens, instead offering a Russian nesting doll metaphor. She states that gender and sex acquire meaning through history, culture, relationships, the psyche, the body, and the cells that make up the body. All of these come together in layers, like the Russian nesting dolls, in our social and personal understanding of sex and gender.

Teresa L. Ebert (1992) interrogates post-modern queer and feminist theorists and their lack of materiality, calling out Butler and other authors for depending so heavily on discursive formations of the body. Ebert argues that gender and sexuality are not only the products of discursive practices performed on the body; rather, they are the results of labor performed by, on, and through bodies that have historically been determined by division of labor and unequal access to economic and social resources.

> The way we live in/through our bodies as men and women, the way our bodies take shape, the way we make sense of and signify our bodies, and even the way we desire and are pleasured in and through our bodies are all affected by our participation in gender- divided labor relations-especially those of racist patriarchal capitalism, whose scope now reaches around the globe. (Ebert, 1992, p. 40)

Ebert calls for emancipatory research that recognizes the reproductive, child bearing work that some bodies do as well as the social conditions that are directly related to

capitalist, economic, and racist interests that affect how the body comes to be known and is experienced.

In reaction to queer theory's lack of materiality and inclusion of intersectional identities such as race and class, Johnson (2001) proposed the concept of "quare" studies to address how queer theory has failed to address the lived, material realities of gay men and lesbians of color. This failure results in a universalization of the queer subject, where queer identity is seen as acting unanimously on all types of bodies; for example, white queer bodies are often viewed as having the same challenges and experiences as queer bodies of color. Johnson questions queer studies' utility to account for racialized and sexualized bodies that are sites of trauma and face physical violence such as beatings, rape, starvation, and exposure. "Quare studies grounds the discursive process of mediated identification and subjectivity in a political praxis that speaks to the material existence of 'colored' bodies" (2001, p. 77). Johnson's vision of quare studies offers an identity politics that acknowledges performativity and its effects as well as focusing on contexts and historical situations. Johnson (2001) calls for subversive acts, but cautions that acts of subversion can also reinforce dominant understandings of identity.

Cyberqueer Studies

Nina Wakeford (1997) argued that Internet studies should forge a stronger bond with sexuality studies since technology and sexuality are both rooted in the social and economic dynamics of late capitalism. Wakeford uses the term *cyberqueer* to refer to the study of sexuality within digital spaces. Themes that are commonly present in cyberqueer studies are the relationship between sexuality and digital space and the construction of queer identities within these spaces. Cyberqueer spaces call for the

creation of and experimentation with queer identities and representations of the body. In a subsequent writing on cyberqueer studies, Wakeford (2002) calls for continued research on the ways that information and communication technologies have impacted how queer lives and experiences have come to be understood. Wakeford (2002) argues that the most significant contribution that cyberqueer studies has made is to draw attention to how practices and spaces have been, or have the potential to be, queered. Although Wakeford presents cyberqueer studies as focusing on Internet research she also calls for future studies that interrogate how other new media technologies become integrated into both public and private queer spaces.

Rohit K. Dasgupta (2012) also addresses space and identity constructions within cyberqueer studies. Dasgupta argues that the Internet has had a profound impact on humanity, destabilizing the boundaries between public and private life. The Internet allows users to be active participants in their identity construction. Internet users do not just consume images and information as they do with other media formats such as film and TV, but rather are active participants in the creation of and engagement with content. The Internet is often viewed as a utopian space where communities can grow and experiment in safe places. Cyber spaces offer the potential for individuals to create new identities and relationships (Booth & Flanagan, 2002). Jones (2008) argues that digital spaces have impacted the manner in which individuals, especially young people, in technologically advanced societies learn and communicate about sex and sexuality. Dasgupta (2012) calls out Jones for his use of the phrase "technologically advanced," claiming that this phrase places queer digital culture within the realm of privilege.

Esperanza Miyake (2004) attempts to bring materiality and the body into cyberqueer research. Invoking Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Miyake investigates how cyberqueer theory can "queer" Haraway's notion of the cyborg. Haraway uses the cyborg as a metaphor that disrupts the binary between fiction and lived experiences and has the potential to impact and change what counts as experience. Miyake argues that for change to occur, women must place their bodies into the digital domain.

> The power of production, the power of sexuality, the power of knowledge and the power of discourse: they are all energies that ultimately come from the body. Therefore, I believe that it is of the utmost political, physical and cultural importance for women to place our bodies into the cybernetic domain…Only then can we anticipate real change, only then can we anticipate real liberation. (2004, p. 54)

Miyake asks how we can place the fleshly body into a cold and abstract cyberspace. She argues that the words that we type onto the computer screen in a sense become our body. Because words typed into a piece of technology (rather than our fleshly, biological bodies) are participating in cyberspace, the Internet opens up a space for queer cyborgs to recreate and re-imagine notions of gender. Technology allows us to become more fluid in our identities, and provides opportunities for alternative models of living. While the notion that the Internet and other new media technologies have given us the ability to virtually shape-shift and try on new identities seems emancipatory, Miyake offers some words of warning about how fluid identities can become in cyberspace, potentially erasing or trivializing material identities. She asks if this newfound technological fluidity

will wipe out identities such as lesbian, or if it will allow all women to try on the identity of lesbian in some form during their lifetimes.

Queer Youth Today

Queer youth today are moving away from terms such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual embraced by previous generations to describe and label sexual orientation. Instead, sexual identity labels are chosen to reflect not just sexuality but also gender and political values (Savin-Williams, 2005). Terms such as pansexual, polygendered, and heteroflexible have made their way into queer youth culture (Abate, 2011). Queer youth see their identities as flexible rather than fixed states; this allows for sites of invention and revision that make change possible (Savin-Williams, 2005). "Youth are emerging with a new vision that sees narrow, fixed identities as confusing and unnecessary" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 138). Wilchins argues that queer youth today are hyper-aware of the elastic and symbolic nature of gender and sexual orientation.

Savin-Williams' (2005) book *The New Gay Teenager* explores the ways that the development of today's youth diverges from that of previous generations. Savin-Williams argues that the mainstream, adult understanding of gay teens today has moved from being a population seen as under siege to a group of young adults recognized as resilient. Despite research that focuses on negative experiences that gay youth face, Savin-Williams claims that gay teens today generally have positive associations with their sexual orientations. *The New Gay Teenager* also calls for the differentiation of sexual orientation from sexual identity. Sexual orientation is defined as erotic feelings and thoughts that one has for individuals of a particular sex, both sexes, or neither sex. Sexual orientation is generally considered to be resistant to change and conscious control;

it influences but is independent from sexual identity. Sexual identity, by contrast, is a social label that names one's own sexual attraction and political and social associations.

Today's queer teens and young adults acknowledge that there are more than the binary options of male/female or gay/straight (Abate, 2011). Halberstam (2005) claims that many young people today see labels as being unnecessary and oppressive and view themselves as operating in a post-gender world. They willingly cast aside labels in order to create a world that is pluralistic, creating the conditions for infinite diversity. Contemporary youth possess "a strong postmodern awareness about the inherently problematic and unsatisfactory nature of any identity label or sexual category" (Abate, 2011, p. 23). These postmodern assumptions about identity can be viewed as both a crisis and an opportunity. They are a crisis of stability of form and meaning, but an opportunity for rethinking the hierarchies and power dynamics present in cultural production (Halberstam, 2005).

An example of postmodern queer youth identities is illustrated in Abate's (2011) exploration of masculine performance in the lesbian "boi." Abate argues that the lesbian boi is one of the re-imagined forms of sexual identity and gender expression that has emerged in the early years of the 21st century. Queer, female-bodied young adults, who eschew femininity and womanhood for a post-pubescent boyhood, often take up this identity category. They present androgynously, keep their hair short, and dress in masculine clothing; some bind their breasts. Lesbian bois combine expectations surrounding lesbian fashion and style with hipster fashion, and often take up genderqueer identities, refusing to place themselves in the male/female binary system of identity.

They often use masculine pronouns when referring to themselves and purposefully situate themselves apart from feminine- identified lesbians. Lesbian bois exist within the transgressive space between hegemonic adolescent boyhood and female identity present within the LGBTQ community, situated in both worlds but refusing to exclusively identify with one mode of existence or another.

Mainstream Discourses Concerning the Queer Teenage Experience

Texts such as films, TV shows, journalistic reports about social movements, theatrical productions, books, medical and psychology journals, and the information generated from the Internet are where many representations of queer desire are located. These representations directly translate into LGBTQ identities that are available for consumption by both queer and heterosexual communities and individuals (Gray, 2009). The dominant discourses present in society are what queer youth look to when attempting to make sense of their own lives and identities. Media representations, specifically, are often where queer youth go to legitimize their own feelings and experiences, and look for role models and guidance (Evans, 2007; Kielwasser & Wolf, 1993). Evans examined portrayals of gay and lesbian characters on TV shows and the effect they had on gay youths' development and understanding of their sexual identity. Ninety percent of the gay and lesbian teens in his study looked to the media for representations of and information about queer identity, because youth often do not have access to such information in their lived, everyday lives. Evans also reported that the youth he interviewed expressed a desire for more diverse media representations of queer youth and the issues faced in their lives. Queer youth have reported that adult-created narratives

tend to focus on the struggles rather than the positives of being a queer teenager. While important, these struggles do not represent a universal queer teen experience.

It is important to examine which representations of queer youth are present in the media because such representations not only shape how queerness in the abstract is perceived in the lived world, but also because queer youth actively seek out these representations to make sense of their own individual sexual identities and experiences. Media discourses about queerness often fall into a small number of narrow, socially acceptable roles (Shelton, 2008). Queerness is often pathologized or constructed as a sick or criminal behavior (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012). TV shows such as *Glee* and public awareness campaigns like the "It Gets Better Project" have begun to make gay, lesbian, and trans experiences part of mainstream consciousness, but these are still produced and controlled by adults with little input from queer teens and young adults (Dhaenens, 2013; Muller, 2011). When the dominant discourses that queer youth are able to access do not reflect their lived experiences, the discourses can cause queer youth to become unintelligible to themselves as well as mainstream society. These discourses often place queer youth into subject positions that force them to depend on adults to tell their stories (Talburt, 2004).

Youth/Adult Binary

Adults and societal institutions hold the power to not only define youth's needs, problems, and solutions, but also to limit the access youth have to resources and means to creatively express themselves and share their experiences (Talburt, 2004). Mainstream producers of discourses about queer teens (TV and film writers and producers, authors of young adult novels) are most often individuals who have worked in heteronormative

media institutions for some time (Pullen, 2009). Adults' positions of authority allow them not only to "promote voyeuristic longings on the part of the adults" but also to regulate and police youth identities, expressions, and behaviors (Driver, 2007, p. 305). The adult perspective becomes more prominent and is considered to be more credible because of the status given to adults (Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010).

Decentering the adult and breaking down the binary between youth as subject/participant and adult as creator/researcher is imperative to queer youth being able to tell their own stories and learn techniques that allow them to share the experience of using their own voices rather than relying on adult storytellers. Stripping the power and authoritative knowledge away from adult-run and -created institutions allows youth to reclaim communication styles and representations, and gives youth the opportunity to become the producers rather than consumers of discourses concerning everyday experiences (Driver, 2007). Autoethnography is one method that can decenter the youth/adult and subject/researcher binaries. When queer youth engage in autoethnographic methods for telling stories it facilitates a breakage in the dichotomy of producer and subject, because the narrative's subject also becomes the narrative's producer. The breakdown of colonialist notions of ethnographer and other that is facilitated by autoethnographic storytelling has roots in queer culture (Russell, 1999). Autoethnography as a means of understanding or giving voice to queer culture is not a new phenomenon; indeed it is common for those researching queer subcultures to be former or current members of the groups they are studying (Halberstam, 2005).

Critical Youth Studies

In the introduction to the book *Representing Youth: Methodological Issues in Critical Youth Studies,* editor Amy L. Best (2007) surveys the state of youth as research subjects. She draws attention to the fact that the study of youth is growing rapidly within a variety of disciplines, yet despite the long history of youth as subjects, youth are often excluded from participating in the research processes that generate knowledge about them. Best calls for an examination of methodologies that allow youth to have power and a voice in the research process. Critical youth studies draws from a diverse framework including cultural studies, queer studies, critical race theory, feminist theory, and postmodernism. It recognizes that youth are the best authorities and sources of knowledge about the experiences and cultures of young people (Richman, 2007). Methods of data collection such as autoethnography, personal narrative, documentary, photo essays, and social action research, which allow youth to participate in the generation of data, are gaining popularity in studies about youth culture and experiences (Best, 2007). These methods allow youth to have discursive empowerment, the ability to define and speak for themselves during the research process (Ungar, 2007). Best identifies Driver's (2007) project, which utilizes video created by queer youth, as an intervention that attempted to examine questions surrounding value, knowledge, and representation. Driver's project is political in the sense that it gives young people the authority to explore and create knowledge about sexuality and to "become co-creators of ideas about their own situations and circumstances" (Best, 2007, p. 15). Projects like Driver's offer the possibility for queer youth to overcome their status as objectified subjects (Best, 2007). Driver acknowledges that employing youth-created video in the manner that she did stripped her of some of her power as a researcher: "Engaging with

queer youth video as a researcher stretches me to accept that my role is bound by what I am able to give back, working to provide the symbolic and material conditions that encourage and support queer youth to tell us what they need and want" (Driver, 2007, p. 323).

Recognition of the power discrepancies between researcher and youth subjects is essential in critical youth studies. Researchers must pay careful attention to their perceived position of authority and the role they play in the process of creating representations and knowledge about youth. Often researchers must acknowledge the tension between their simultaneous insider/outsider statuses (Best, 2007). Many times researchers share identities and subject positions with the youth they are studying, and it is age and social standing that give researchers their perceived authority. Halberstam (2005) discusses the alliances that often develop between the minority researcher and minority subculture. When these alliances are created within the study of queer subcultures, academics become key players in the construction and representation of queer archives of knowledge and memory.

Youth Self-Representation via Media

Regales (2008) explored transgender teens' creation of zines (handmade, independent magazines, often created through the use of collage that is physically cut from paper and glued together) as a safe way for youth to negotiate identities and differences. The self-representation that the teens engaged in allowed Regales to study how this particular group of young people expressed themselves and communicated about who they wanted to become. The zines' producers used the creative process as an opportunity to write themselves into new lives where they felt free to express themselves

without fear or negative repercussions. The teens used a variety of visual strategies and written language in order to construct their stories and identities. Moreover, the teen writers engaged with cultural theory in their projects as they attempted to place themselves on the gender spectrum and wrestle with identity and self-understanding. Regales argues that queer and feminist theorists have much to learn from the discourses produced by the teen zine writers.

Moving from paper to digital platforms, Pullen (2009) investigated how the Internet and new media technologies provide queer youth with spaces to enter into discourses about queer youth experiences that exist outside of mainstream, adult-created texts. New media technologies give queer youth the ability to construct new social worlds, where queer romances and desires can take center stage, engage in discussions, and challenge the heteronormative constraints of mainstream media. When queer youth involve themselves in the creation and performance of texts they are able to extend the potential of the types of discourses available. Queer youth are becoming increasingly involved in the creation of self-reflexive media projects that are free from repressive controls of mainstream discourse. This allows queer youth to question and challenge ritual norms connected to aspects of daily living such as social networking, dating, and romance.

Digital multimedia storytelling is one way that queer youth can engage in creating counter-discourses. Podkalicka and Campbell (2010) argue that digital storytelling has a history of being used as a means to empower marginalized voices. Digital technologies such as video and still-photography cameras and computer software that are used to edit and manipulate images have become much more accessible, allowing even those who are

not professional media producers to use technological tools for the creation of narrative projects (Rogers et al., 2010).

Several researchers have used digital multimedia storytelling as a way to explore the results of voice-giving through narrative projects with youth (Bloustien, 1998; Driver, 2007; Kearney, 2006; Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010; Rhoades, 2012; Shelton, 2008; Talburt, 2004). These researchers agree that facilitating opportunities for youth, especially those who hold marginalized positions in addition to being young (such as identifying as a girl, low income, or queer) give participants a sense of empowerment as they are able to speak in their own unique voices that reflect their experiences. Multimedia projects offer youth the opportunity to engage in theorizing identity and power, and lead to both confidence and competency in articulating their own voices (Driver, 2007; Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010).

Previous studies also agree that the result of self-representation through the use of digital multimedia projects empowers youth to create counter-narratives that may challenge adult understandings of the youth experience. Multimedia video projects can provide spaces for creative resistance that communicates feelings and experiences of being part of a marginalized group (Shelton, 2008). The media produced by youth in mentorship video and multimedia programs expand the diversity of public representation and challenge and complicate the dominant narratives and conceptualizations associated with queer youth (Kearney, 2006; Shelton, 2008). Even when youth video projects appear to be embodying or reinforcing stereotypes, they still have the ability to promote self-reflection that allows for the projects' producers to move toward emancipatory and critical expressions of identity (Rogers et al., 2010).

Video and other forms of multimedia give youth the opportunity for change, transformation, and control of the discourses they create (Bloustein, 1998). Participants often challenge dominant narratives and ideologies of gender, sexuality, and race (Kearney, 2006; Rogers et al., 2010). Self-representation gives youth who engage in multimedia production projects the opportunity to create their own languages to tell their stories, as well as the ability to experiment with storytelling techniques that use non-linear storylines that may better reflect their lived experiences (Bloustein, 1998; Shelton, 2008).

Driver (2007) argues for the use of multimedia projects produced by queer youth as research tools to aid in the understanding of queer youth experiences and to decenter adult power. Allowing the creative projects produced by teenagers to be a starting point for qualitative research removes adult and institutional authoritative knowledge and permits youth to take the lead in knowledge production. Driver actively engaged with community programs where youth were able to locate resources that allowed them to produce self-representations. To build her argument, Driver employed "Untitled," a digital video project produced through the 2002 Queer Youth Video program by Natasha Pike, a queer teenage girl. who produced her video. Natasha's video is told from the perspective of a transgender youth as she grows and moves from childhood to adolescence. Natasha's journey from child to adult is interrupted as she enters her teenage years and begins to experience gender subversions and transgressions. Her video represents queer sexuality as a conflicting aspect of her identity and actively challenges mainstream notions of gender and sexuality. Driver concludes, "the end result of working

with queer youth video is a gathering of cultural practices that refuse systematic closure, insisting on the renewal of readings over and over again" (2007, pp. 322-323).

Vivienne and Burgess (2012, 2013) investigated Rainbow Family Tree, a website and media production workshop that allow queer adults to create and upload video based digital storytelling projects. As is true with youth video projects, digital storytelling functions as a means for constructing and sharing life narratives. Vivienne and Burgess (2013) argue that the documenting and sharing of non-normative identities through the use of digital technologies is an enactment of Butler's (1990) performativity. In their earlier (2012) article the authors point out that digital tools, such as video technology, allow for greater control over how individuals represent and present themselves to the public. The storytellers of the Rainbow Family Tree project construct, both literally and figuratively, versions of their identities that are distinct from the more spontaneous performances of identity in face-to-face situations. In their 2013 article, Vivienne and Burgess explore the process that storytellers went through to construct their identities and performances, noting that there was often a tension between the public and the private. While participants found some type of personal gain in participating in the project there was still some hesitation or caution taken due to the potential dangers of going public with a non-normative sexual or gender identity. The authors concluded that sharing identities and experiences on Internet platforms extends beyond the individual posting content. There is a potential danger to the physical body and to the material, lived experiences of those who out themselves in cyberspace, and this issue of safety must be negotiated in the construction of identities being performed in public, digital spaces.

Despite the potential dangers of digital identity performances, technology such as digital video has been employed in a number of social justice-oriented organizations and projects (Bloustein, 1998; Driver, 2007; Podkalicka & Campbell, 2010; Rhoades, 2012; Rodgers et al., 2010). Because of its relative low cost and ease of use compared to traditional film formats, digital video is sometimes framed as an answer to discriminatory practices, and thus as a sign of progress. Gallagher and Kim (2008) explore the expanding use of digital video in qualitative research, calling for a recognition of the colonial history present in the use of the camera. Capturing images with both still and moving image cameras has been associated with forms of social control and surveillance, as the camera can be a tool to document and study the "exotic." The language used to describe the process of using digital video such as *shooting, capturing the subject*, and *white balance* (the process of calibrating and adjusting the intensity of colors captured by digital video) carry violent and colonial connotations. Digital video favors white skin tones over those of color, privileging those with lighter skin and impacting the final outcome. The dominant techniques and genres associated with film and video production are often reproduced in amateur projects. Voyeurism, Gallagher and Kim (2008) argue, is a potential problematic outcome of using image and audio records.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to assemble a framework to better understand the emergent discourses present in the digital video projects created by RQY participants. First, I examined the concept of discourse, focusing on Foucault's understanding of discourse as rooted in power and as a means of knowledge production. I also examined how discourse facilitates the construction and understanding of gender. Next, in order to

contextualize and understand queer identity and its construction I explored notions of

queer identity, queer theory and studies, and criticisms. In this section I discussed queer's

relationship to gay and lesbian identities and studies. Because the texts that I am using

for my thesis are digital videos uploaded onto the Internet, I brought cyberqueer studies

into my framework to help contextualize identity construction in mediated platforms. In

addition to examining how technology impacts queer identity construction, I also looked

at literature addressing how contemporary youth are conceptualizing queer identities and

experiences. Next, I investigated the youth/adult binary and how critical youth studies

can break down the relational hierarchy between adult researchers and youth. Finally, I

explored how queer youth use media for self-representation and potential negative effects

that can result from sharing digital video online.

     The following chapter will describe the methods I employed in my investigation

of the RQY videos. My methods of analysis consist of discourse analysis and critical

technocultural discourse analysis. The chapter will also go into more detail about the

videos from the RQY project.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This chapter describes the data set I am using, data selection, and describes my

methods of analysis.

The following research questions guide my study.

RQ1: What discourses emerge when queer youth are given the resources

to produce digital video projects?

a) What language, both verbal and visual, do queer youth use to

represent their experiences and self-identities?

b) In what ways do the discourses created by queer youth video

projects challenge, resist, confirm, or speak to normative notions

of identity?

RQ2: How does digital video as a technocultural space shape and

influence the discourses concerning queer identities and experiences?

Data: Queer Youth Video Projects

The data sources for this project are short video projects produced by queer youth

participating in the Reel Queer Youth (RQY) video mentorship program. RQY was

chosen because of the diversity of styles and narratives of the videos available for public

viewing. Eleven videos produced in the program between 2009 and 2012 have been

made available online through the video sharing site Vimeo for both streaming and

download. All 11 videos will be examined for this project.

The videos are diverse and range in style, comprising both fiction and non-fiction

works. Most of the videos rely on live-action actors and participants, but several use

stop-action animation. Two of the videos, "Gender Menu" and "The Rest of Us," explore the confining nature of gender binaries. Others create alternative pasts and futures, such as "Cherry Bomb," which imagines the experience of a queer girl who inspired Katy Perry's song "I Kissed a Girl," and "In the President's Shoes," which explores what a future with a gay president might look like. Several of the videos express a desire for queer youth to be recognized for individual traits that are not tied to sexual identity and orientation and to dispel stereotypes about sexual identity. Others touch on experiences that impact daily life such as suicide and romance. (Summaries of all 11 videos can be found in Appendix A.)

Within each video I looked for elements that allowed me to address my proposed research questions. I focused on how, both verbally and visually, the videos address notions of identity experiences. This includes the actual words used to label and name sexual and gender identities, as well as visual representations such as the inclusion of androgynous appearing characters or the ways that bodies are dressed to represent maleness and femaleness. I also focused on narrative elements such as relationships between characters, themes such as suicide and loneliness, and the creation of alternate social worlds.

Methods of Analysis

I am working within the tradition of discourse analysis, particularly drawing from critical technocultural discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is a form of textual analysis, which is used to describe and interpret characteristics of recorded messages, including those of content, structure, and function (Frey, Butan, & Kreps, 1999). Textual analysis research projects are concerned

with language, both verbal and visual, and are specifically concerned with what language represents and how we use it to make sense of our lives and experiences. Scholars working in this tradition have the goal of evaluating the multiple meanings found in texts and how these meanings relate to and are connected with social realities (Brenmen, 2013).

Textual analysis has roots in semiotics, which allows us to interpret the codes and signs used to make meaning and to understand how the words, concepts, ideas, themes, and issues that exist within texts communicate the socially constructed realities of their producers and consumers (Brenmen, 2013). Textual analysis works under the assumption that moving images and other texts contain meaning that exists outside the boundaries of the frame. In addition to narrative elements, stylistic components that constitute the image such as camera placement and movement, use of colors, animation techniques, and lighting also provide valuable information and aid in constructing and analyzing a text's meaning (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012). Meaning is made on three levels within a text: First, meaning is found in the production of the text (who produced the text and how the text was produced); second, the image itself holds meaning; third, meaning is found in how the image is seen or consumed (Rose, 2012).

Within the broader category of textual analysis, I draw primarily from the traditions of discourse analysis. Discourse can be defined as patterns of meaning that create symbolic systems that individuals employ to make sense of the world and their subject positions (Parker, 1999). Discourse analysis focuses on what was said, how it was said, and what was achieved by its communication (van Zoonen, 1994). Its purpose is to examine textual structures, to gain a deeper understanding of how language describes

people's experiences, feelings, opinions, and observations, and to determine what is achieved by this language use. Discourse analysis is used to uncover how discourses are structured and organized, and what types of knowledge discourses produce. Discourse is not confined to verbal language. Visual discourse analysis allows us to treat visual images as language and is concerned with how social activities and identities are constructed within visual texts (Albers, 2007).

In conducting a discourse analysis, texts should be closely examined for how effects of truth are produced, for complexity and contradictions, for what is made visible and invisible, and for details the researcher feels aid in addressing her research questions. In addition to the information contained within the texts themselves, the social position/location/context in which the text was produced should also be taken into account (Rose, 2012). Discourse analysis is flexible and the material should drive the investigation.

Because the texts that I am examining employ mediated communication situations in an online, digital environment, I also draw from critical technocultural discourse analysis, or CTDA (Brock, 2009). CTDA allows Internet communication phenomena to be examined through interfaces such as Internet technologies in order to understand how technology's form and purpose mediate discourse. Brock draws heavily on Carey's (1975) argument that communication technologies create representations of culturally shared beliefs, and that communication technology should be studied from the viewpoint of how technologies produce, maintain, and transform reality. Brock employs Nakamura's (2006) and Dinerstein's (2006) arguments to add a critical approach to the analysis of the cultural influences on how and why communication technologies are used.

Nakamura argues that cyberculture must be placed within the framework of racism and globalization. To this end, he proposes using critical race theory, which allows for the examination of structural instances of privilege and power, and cultural theory to analyze Internet content. Brock builds on Dinerstein's argument that technology should be situated within the power matrix of progress, religion, Whiteness, modernity, masculinity, and the future. While Brock used CTDA to examine the construction of racial identities on the Internet through interactions on several webpages, in this study I adapted CTDA to include visual and moving image Internet content in the construction and representation of gender and sexual identities. Using discourse analysis, as outlined previously, combined with CTDA allows me to not only analyze the content of the texts produced by RQY participants, but also to contextualize the texts relative to digital video technology and Internet hosting of digital video projects more generally.

In order to discover the meanings and relationships that emerge from queer youth video projects, I conducted my analysis in four steps. Steps one and two, familiarizing myself with the texts and identifying emergent themes, were inspired by Rose's (2012) method of discourse analysis. Steps three and four, identifying and describing contextualizing elements and putting elements into conversation with themes identified in step two, draw from Brock's (2009) CTDA.

According to Rose, first, the researcher attempts to approach the material with a fresh perspective and let go of any preconceptions she has about the texts in question. The researcher immerses herself in the material, consuming the texts several times and becoming intimately familiar with their content. Consequently, my first step involved watching all 11 videos in the RQY collection several times and becoming intimately

familiar with their content, structure, and style without drawing conclusions about what messages and discourses are constructed within the projects.

According to Rose (2012), after the researcher has familiarized herself with the texts, the process of coding begins. The researcher identifies key themes, words, language use, images, or techniques that are present within the texts. A list of key themes and patterns is compiled and the texts are reexamined using this list as a lens. At this stage the researcher begins to make connections between the key themes, words, language use, images, and techniques. The researcher returns to the texts as many times as needed as questions and potential themes arise, continually updating and reworking the master list. Consequently, my second step involved creating a list of themes present in the texts. For example, preliminary repeated viewing of the video "No Homo" allowed me to identify the following themes, which occur throughout the entire set of videos I analyzed: dispelling stereotypes; existing outside of gendered norms; naming and labeling sexual identities; and the desire to have personality traits acknowledged that are separate from sexual identities. The themes from this video as well as the others in the collection were compiled into a master list, which was used to compare themes across videos during later viewings. Intertextual patterns, relationships, and connections were established. (For example, the theme of naming and labeling sexual identities was also present in the video "Reel Life.") After the lists of themes and production elements were compiled and intertextual connections and relationships were established, I examined how these themes and relationships created discourses and knowledges about queer youth experiences.

My third step involved adapting Brock's concept of contextualizing elements to examine how queer identity was constructed within technocultural space.   Because Brock was working with a weblog and reader comments about a mainstream TV program, the contextualizing elements he identified as important do not seamlessly cross over into analyzing user-generated video content hosted on a website. In order to engage in the contextual analysis needed for CTDA I identified and described elements specific to web-hosted digital video that contributed to the construction and representations of queer identities and experiences : (a) cultural: mainstream discourses about queer youth and identities; (b) environmental: the RQY program; (c) production techniques and elements: preproduction, production, and postproduction; and (d) platform: Vimeo, the web based video hosting site where the RQY videos were archived. The fourth step consisted of placing the elements identified in step two into conversation with the contextualizing elements in step three in order to gain a deeper understanding regarding of how the identified contextualizing elements influenced the contents and discourses present in the RQY videos.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discussed my data set, the videos made available by RQY, and the steps that make up my method of analysis. My thesis uses textual analysis; specifically discourse analysis and critical technocultural discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was employed to discover what the youth were saying and how they were saying it within the video projects. CTDA allows for the videos to be contextualized within the culture and environment they are produced in, as well as the means of production and

distribution platform. In the following chapter I will share the results of my deployment of discourse analysis and CTDA.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Discussion

The following chapter has two goals: (a) to identify and describe both the discursive themes and contextualizing elements, and (b) to place the themes and contextualizing elements into conversation with one another.   The first portion of my analysis, emergent discourses, addresses the discursive themes developed in steps one and two of my method of analysis, which included familiarizing myself with the RQY videos and then identifying emergent themes present within the videos. The emergent discourses I identified are: (a) complex representation of experiences; (b) addressing gender binaries; and (c) change and self-responsibility.   The second half of the chapter addresses the contextual elements I identified through the use of CTDA and the conversations between emergent discourses and contextualizing elements. The four contextual elements identified are: (a) culture; (b) environment; (c) production, and (d) platform. I identified four conversations among the elements and discourses: (a) sexual and gender identity labels; (b) unspoken discourses: reinforcing queer universality; (c) cyberqueer materiality and technocultural space; and (d) queer technological progress.

Emergent Discourses

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings generated by queer youth video projects I will employ Foucault's understanding of "discourse." I am drawing from Foucault because his conceptualization of "discourse" has a special connotation beyond merely conversation. Foucault understood discourse as groups of statements that enabled people to understand themselves and the social world. Discourse determines what is and is not known about the world and produces both knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972;

Rose, 2012). Foucault (1980) stated that discourse analysis will not determine Truth or tell us what is correct, but it will allow researchers to make connections between meaning, power, and knowledge. I will be using Foucault's understanding of discourse to explore what knowledges are being produced by the queer youth video projects, and how by construction of these knowledges queer youth are expanding on what is and can be known and talked about. I will examine how statements made in the videos come together and form relationships that reflect queer youth experiences and give youth the power to describe and give voice to their own identities.

The discursive themes that emerged from the videos shed light on the lived experiences and desires of the youth who participated in the RQY video production workshop. The videos express desires and become spaces in which to express and work through challenges and to imagine worlds where circumstances are different and heteronormative expectations do not constrain choices. The three themes I identified were: (a) complex representations of experiences; (b) concern with gender binaries; and (c) change and self-responsibility. (Appendix B charts the three themes and their corresponding videos).

Complex representations of experiences . The first theme that I am going to examine is the apparent desire for more complex representations of queer youth experiences. Within this theme I identified three sub-themes: (a) recognition that queer youth are more than sexual identities and stereotypes; (b) depictions of romantic relationships; and (c) writing queerness into narratives.

More than sexual identity/stereotypes. A theme that appears across three of the videos is the concept of being more than one's sexual identity, or not adhering to

stereotypes associated with sexual identities. In the video "I Am Me" a variety of teens

and adults list social positions and identities they hold such as teacher, camp counselor,

singer, and tea drinker. The video participants are then shown repeating the phrase, "I am

me." After two minutes of montaging through faces the screen goes black and the words

"I am more than," followed by sexual identity titles such as gay, lesbian, bisexual,

transgender, and queer, appear flashing across the screen. The video concludes with the

statement "I am more than my sexual orientation" written in white letters on a black

screen.

Similar in tone and style, the video "Reel Life" is also a non-fiction piece using

medium close-up shots of youth speaking about identities. The video starts with

participants introducing themselves with their names and ages followed by their sexual

identities. The participants then describe their living situations (with roommates, with

parents and family members, or with partners) and if they feel that they have support

from their families (all the participants included in the video felt that they had familial

support). The video concludes with participants describing what it means to be a queer

ally.

In the video "Pro Homo," three female-bodied teenagers rap about not adhering to

stereotypes associated with the identities dyke, femme, and bisexual. The dyke-identified

participant speaks about how neither she nor her partner "wears the pants" in their

relationship even though she has short hair and presents in a masculine manner. She also

speaks about not necessarily being tough and at one point frolics through a field of

flowers. The femme-identified participant challenges the idea that femme-presenting

lesbians are always girly. The participant states at the beginning of her segment that

"there are a lot of facets to my personality." She defends her right to wear dresses and heels while at the same time enjoying sports and performing more masculine and aggressive behaviors. The third video participant addresses many of the misconceptions associated with being bisexual. She challenges the notion that girls engage in bisexual behaviors for the enjoyment of men, and that bisexual individuals are attracted to both genders equally, stating that she'd prefer to settle down with a wife even though she finds men attractive.

Depictions of relationships. Unsurprisingly, depictions of romantic relationships appear in three of the videos. Several of the participants in "Pro Homo" make reference to current or potential future relationships throughout the video, while "Cherry Bomb" and "Make Your Own Montage" have a stronger focus on non-heteronormative relationships. "Cherry Bomb" deals with an unrequited crush (something that many teens experience, regardless of sexual identity) and "Make Your Own Montage" depicts two relationships. "Cherry Bomb's" story centers around the crush of an unnamed female bodied, yet masculine presenting, character on a female classmate. The story is told through the main character's diary entries in which she describes her intense feelings for her classmate, and doodles initials inside of a heart.

"Make Your Own Montage's" storyline includes a relationship that ends as well as a brand new relationship. "Montage's" main character is a super hero whose relationship with an androgynous presenting character ends when they[3] discover that the main

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[3] I am employing the singular *they* and *their* in instances when an individual's preferred gender identity and pronoun are not made available.

character is actually a super hero who has been spending their nights saving local citizens from oppression. The video concludes with our super hero rescuing an apparently male bodied, masculine presenting character from a bully, after which the two walk into the sunset together holding hands.

Writing Queerness into Narratives. Three of the videos actively re-imagine narratives to include explicit queerness. "Cherry Bomb" uses the popular Katy Perry song "I Kissed a Girl" which is told from the straight girl's perspective and offers us the same story from the point of view of the girl who inspired Perry's hit song. "Cherry Bomb" shifts the focus of "I Kissed a Girl" away from the straight girl who kisses girls despite having a boyfriend, and instead onto the girl who was the recipient of this kiss. "Make Your Own Montage" flips the expected and traditional superhero narrative. Rather than a damsel in distress, the superhero rescues a masculine, male bodied character from evil and they leave together, presumably happily ever after. "In the President's Shoes" is formatted as a mock news interview with a future president who is in a relationship with a trans partner and speaks openly about having a personal interest and investment in the LGBTQ community.

Relationships among sub-themes. When examined in relation to one another, the three sub-themes identified above indicate that the youth who produced these videos are concerned about having their identities and personalities stereotyped, about not being viewed as whole people outside of their identities, about seen as capable of having romantic relationships, and about seeing their experiences reflected in narratives and situations that are usually assumed to be heterosexual.

The emphasis placed on having interests and identities outside of a sexual identity or not adhering to expectations suggests a tension in the lives of the youth who produced these videos. On one hand they are clearly laying claim to some type of explicitly queer identity through their participation in a program aimed specifically at queer youth. On the other hand, however, even though the youth who produced these videos have aligned themselves with a queer, non-straight identity they also seem to manifest a desire to be (or be seen as) something or someone besides their sexual identities. The desire to be viewed outside of a sexual identity, yet at the same time have access to representations of non-heterosexual relationships, is apparent in the reoccurrence of depictions of romantic relationships in the videos. There are a variety of romantic relationships shown in the videos, but there is never a crisis moment built around, or a big deal made out of, the fact that the characters are actively pursuing relationships that exist outside of heterosexual norms. This indicates, at least for this particular group of youth, that when they are communicating with each other about relationships, sexual orientation and identity are not things to worry about. Even in "Cherry Bomb," which ends with the main character feeling depressed about her crush not liking her back, the unrequited love isn't treated any differently because it was between two female- bodied individuals rather than a female-bodied and male-bodied couple.

I feel that the videos that write queer characters and situations into traditionally heteronormative situations and spaces (politics, pop music, the superhero story) originate from similar desires as the inclusion of relationships. There is an indication that the youth who produced these particular videos wrote themselves into heteronormative narratives in order to add a layer of complexity to queer sexual identities. Having queer

characters appearing in normative narratives allows queerness to be present in situations that are typically assumed to be filled by straight identities and offers a counter-narrative to the queer in crisis. In other words, queerness is the central plot device to which queer media representations often fall prey.

Overall, the three themes discussed above indicate a desire to see queer representations that take on the whole person, and acknowledge that those who hold queer identities are more than their sexual identity; indeed, they are whole people with hobbies, interests, families, and characteristics outside of who they are romantically and sexually attracted to. There is a tension between (a) the need to acknowledge a queer label or identifier in some way in order to counter and speak to heteronormative representations and (b) the desire to be seen as a person first and as having a sexual orientation or identity second. Even though media representation has come a long way and made significant strides in its depictions of queer youth, the videos examined here indicate that queer youth are still having to push back against assumptions and stereotypes.

Concern regarding gender binaries. The second theme that emerged from the videos addressed the participants' concern with gender binaries. Two sub-themes were identified that support gender binaries being a significant issue in the lives of the video producers: (a) challenging the gender binary and creating new options and (b) discrimination, isolation and mental torment related to not fitting into a binary gender identity.

Challenging gender binaries and seeking new options. Four of the videos produced by Reel Queer Youth involve participants who question or challenge the notion

of the male/female, boy/girl binary. "The Rest of Us" begins with an androgynous presenting person attempting to enter gendered restrooms. The doors appear to be stuck for this person, despite others (who present as traditional males or females) being able to enter the room. Two other androgynous people appear and attempt to enter the restrooms but are also denied entry. The three androgynous characters come together and create paper figures that don't adhere to the normative man and woman restroom signs. They tape them to the wall with an arrow pointing up a staircase away from the binary restrooms. The three walk up the stairs past their new genderless icons into a bright light.

"Gender Menu" begins in a cafe where there are two lines of people, one dressed all in blue and the other dressed all in pink. They walk toward a table, pick up a menu that corresponds to their clothing color, and proceed to their tables. The pink "girl" menus include stereotypical feminized foods such as salads while the blue menus include options such as steak and other "manly" foods. A person dressed in black comes in and stands between the two lines and switches the menus, giving blue menus to the people dressed in pink, and pink menus to those dressed in blue. This results in confusion for the cafe patrons, followed by the cafe manager demanding that customers either pick the male or female menu or leave, resulting in a mass exit from the cafe. The former customers protest the limited binary options. The sign outside the cafe is then shown with the words "under new management," while inside a new menu offers choices such as female, butch, genderfluid, trigender, male, transgender, and genderqueer. The new menu asks cafe patrons to choose one, two, or three of the options or to create their own option.

The third video to address the gender binary is "Paranoia," which tells the story of a gender non-conforming person as they prepare for and attend an interview for a job. The character is refereed to by both masculine and feminine pronouns, and does not get the job they were applying for because of their non-binary gender presentation, and the video ends in the suicide of the main character. The fourth video, "I Am Human," also deals with the mental challenges that come with a non-binary gender identity. The first half of the video is spent inside the main character's head as they face society and judgment as they are asked several times if they're a boy or a girl. The main character eventually breaks away from judgment and society declaring that they are human and that they had to learn to break free of judgment and binary gender expectations.

Discrimination/isolation/mental torment. Four of the videos deal with discrimination/isolation and/or mental torment in some way. The President character featured in the video "In the President's Shoes" speaks about discrimination and how part of his presidential project is to actively take steps to reduce discrimination that affects the LGBT community. "Paranoia" and "I Am Human" visually take viewers inside their main characters' heads and mental processes. In "Paranoia" a shirtless figure covered in black and brown paint appears, holding a gun to the main character's head as the main character experiences stressful and discriminatory moments; the figure is present when the main character ultimately commits suicide. As viewers we are introduced to this character through a red filter that was applied to the image during post-production, signaling that this figure is part of the main character's thought process, not a part of the discriminatory situations unfolding before us. "I Am Human" also visually navigates between the main character's thought process and reality. Although the video begins with

the main character walking down a sunny street we are soon taken to a dark room where the main character is crouching on the ground while in the background a voice whispers, "weak, fragile, girl." We return to lived reality after the main character physically pushes through actors playing the parts of society and judgment out of the way and is able to escape the room they were being held in.

"Space is a Lonely Place" is the least overtly queer video made available for viewing. It is also the only video that does not feature live actors; rather, it uses stop-action animation created from construction paper and animated photographs of people. The story centers around a lonely astronaut who is searching for life in space. We see the astronaut chronicle his isolation in a journal and shed a blue paper tear at one point. The astronaut lands on what at first seems to be an empty planet after sending a message calling for friendship. When the astronaut exits the ship he plants a rainbow flag into the ground before exploring. Once on the planet the astronaut stumbles onto a dance party created through the use of photographs of real teens animated to appear as if they are moving.

Relationships among sub-themes. The narratives challenging or resisting gender binaries as well as those that address the damaging mental effects of the binary gender system indicate that the youth producing these films are concerned with how society conceptualizes and treats gender. There are several gender non-conforming characters that appear throughout the videos and there are several instances of discrimination that are directly linked to identifying as neither male or female. In "The Rest of Us," discrimination is illustrated by restroom doors that refuse to open. Although the gendered public restrooms are used metaphorically in this video, bathroom safety and

access is a very real concern for many gender non-conforming individuals. Another instance of metaphorical gender non-conforming discrimination occurs in "Gender Menu." The cafe's patrons are thrown out by the manager after they refuse to choose either the female or the male menu. The story line of "Paranoia" is directly related to the discrimination the main character faces due to gender nonconformity, and "I Am Human" also deals with mental distress due to feeling like the main character is not meeting gendered expectations. This distress is often linked with the call for change to the binary system.

Change and self-responsibility. A third theme that emerged was change and self-responsibility. Calling for or creating change, either as a community or on a personal level, was apparent throughout seven of the videos. In "The Rest of Us" three of the video's characters come together in order to create new gender options that exist outside of the man/woman binary. They each symbolically bring a different tool (represented in the video as construction paper, markers, and scissors) and create new options rather than operating within a system that does not allow for non-binary options or waiting for others to instigate change. "Gender Menu" also depicts actions that lead to visible changes. An individual begins by switching menus, an act that ultimately leads to a public protest and the opening of a new cafe that offers non-binary gender options in infinite configurations.

While "The Rest of Us" and "Gender Menu" depict change that involves coming together as a community, "Make Your Own Montage" and "I Am Human" depict personal growth and change. In "Montage" the main superhero character, although pushed into action by a friend, must find it within himself to make positive changes in his life and overcome the heartbreak of a failed relationship and ultimately open himself to

love again. In "I Am Human" the main character must fight through internalized expectations about gender in order to emerge feeling a sense of pride and self-acceptance despite not meeting society's expectations.

"In the President's Shoes" includes the title character directly stating that he is excited that his position as president will allow him to take steps to ensure that positive changes are made for the LGBTQ community. In contrast to this video's direct verbal messages about inciting change, "Space is a Lonely Place" is subtler in its depiction of taking personal responsibility for change. Instead of wallowing in space by himself and waiting passively for people to come to him, the astronaut sends out a message seeking friendship. "Paranoia," while it does not depict characters taking actions to promote change, can be read as a cautionary account about the consequences of living in a world that is not adapting to changes in gender identity and presentation.

Contextualizing Elements

In addition to examining discursive themes that emerged from the projects, I also identified contextual elements. A crucial aspect of Brock's (2009) CTDA is to contextualize the identified elements operating in identity construction. As discussed above in chapter three, in Brock's work on the construction of race through comments and interactions on a weblog, he identified four contextualizing elements: culture, Internet, ecological, and social. Because I am working with texts that were produced in a different medium and context than Brock, I adapted the contextual elements I identified in order to better fit within the context of digital videos that were produced in a workshop setting, and then uploaded onto a video sharing website. In this section I will describe the

four elements that I identified during my data collection and analysis: (a) cultural; (b) environment; (c) production; and (d) platform.

Cultural element: Mainstream media discourses about queer youth identities and experiences. As discussed in chapter two, media texts such as films, TV shows, new stories, academic studies, and novels all contribute to our understandings about queer youth, their self-identities, and their experiences. Queer youth look to these discourses for guidance and queer role models (Evans, 2007; Kielwasser & Wolf, 1993). Even though there has been an increase in queer visibility in the media texts targeted at teenagers, with TV shows such as *Glee, Secret Life of the American Teenager, Skins, Grey's Anatomy,* and *The Fosters* all including queer identified characters, and even though there are instances of narratives that include happy and well adjusted queer characters, media depictions still often fall prey to stereotypes and are often based on heterosexual values and desires. Common depictions of queer youth include the struggles and negative aspects of living with a queer identity, stereotypical personality associations, such as the overly effeminate gay male character or the suffering victim (Dhaenes, 2013; Evans, 2007). In addition to common stereotypes, white queer characters are overrepresented while queer characters of color are underrepresented (Kessler, 2011).

Not only has there been an increase in media depictions of identities such as lesbian, bisexual and gay, there has also been an increase in representations of transgender individuals. Cole is a transgender teen on the ABC Family show *The Fosters*. Cole was born biologically female, but has transitioned to a male identity through the use of hormones, binding his breasts, and using male pronouns. Cole speaks about feeling as

if he were born in the wrong body, a story common to mainstream depictions of trans experiences. *The Fosters* is making some strides in the representation of trans youth experiences. Cole is played by a transgender actor, and the character addresses hardships that many trans teens face such as being kicked out of his parent's home, turning to sex work for survival, and being placed in a group home for teenage girls despite identifying as a boy (Kane, 2014).

Even though characters such as Cole are contributing to more diverse gender identities in media, representations of those with gender non-conforming identities who fall outside of the transgender identity are virtually non-existent. Gender non-conforming characters are still placed within a trans narrative, and a search for reoccurring TV characters that explicitly identified as other gender non-conforming identities, such as genderqueer or agender, which often operate outside of binary gender identities, rendered nothing. It is important to recognize what is and is not being said in mainstream media discourses because these discourses have the power to frame how queer identified youth construct their identities.

Environment: RQY program. In addition to considering the larger media discourse within which the videos are operating, it is also crucial to consider the context in which the videos were produced. The videos that make up my data set were all produced within the context of a weeklong workshop aimed at giving queer teens the opportunity to learn about digital video production and media literacy skills. The videos were produced by groups of participants who are mentored by professional filmmakers. Reel Grrls, one of the sponsors, explicitly states on its website that the organization's goal is to empower youth through media production, and the RQY Facebook page emphasizes

the social justice element of the program. The goals and mission of the RQY program are important when considering the final video project because they ultimately will influence the types of videos that get made.

Production: Digital video production. Part of the RQY program involves introducing the participants to mentors with professional video production experience -- people who, it can be inferred, are knowledgeable about and regularly participate in industry standards of video production. The standard video production process, for both scripted and documentary style productions, occurs in three steps: (a) preproduction; (b) production; and (c) postproduction.

Preproduction is the planning stage. During this phase, scripts and interview questions are written, research is conducted, storyboards are drawn, and location scouting and casting take place. Pre-production is when video producers make decisions about content and style. This stage is important in the consideration of how RQY participants constructed their identities and experiences. As Vivienne and Burgess (2012) discussed, digital video projects allow for a great amount of control in regard to how individuals construct and present themselves to the public. It is during preproduction when the initial groundwork is laid for how identities and experiences are to be depicted and constructed in digital video projects. I unfortunately did not have access to documents that may have been generated during this stage for the videos I examined.

After the pre-production phase comes production, during which the actual footage is shot. This stage includes many of the production elements that we end up seeing and hearing in the final project. During the production phase, elements such as camera angle and frame, set design, costuming, lighting, and staging of actors or interviewees come

into being. An example of the importance of shooting location is clearly illustrated by "I

Am Human." In this video we see two very distinct sets; the first is a sunny

neighborhood street, and the other is a dark unfurnished room with two heavy doors, a

setting that is meant to depict the main character's thought process and contrast to the

street they escape to. An important aspect of video production to remember, especially

when comparing it to other forms of communication, is that it is possible to re-shoot

scenes or lines of dialogue, essentially allowing for a redo, which is often not possible in

other forms of identity construction/performance such as face-to-face communication.

The final phase is postproduction, which builds upon the work done in

preproduction and production. Postproduction includes editing images and sounds

together.   It also includes aspects such as adding a soundtrack and graphics to the final

product. Editing allows for the incorporation or creation of images and lines of dialogue

that were not necessarily recorded during production. An example of this occurs in "I

Am Me." Most likely the participants were recorded separately and then their answers

were split apart and edited together thematically. Postproduction also allows for special

effects to be added. This occurs in "Paranoia" when the video takes on a red tint every

time the boy with the gun appears on the screen.

Platform: Vimeo. After postproduction was completed for the RQY videos they

were uploaded onto Vimeo, a video hosting website created by filmmakers who wanted a

platform to share their work (Vimeo, n.d.). Vimeo users can create accounts and profiles,

upload video projects, and comment on other users' videos. Vimeo allows people from

all over the world to view and comment on videos. When the RQY video projects were

posted on Vimeo they became available for public consumption and use. Although

Vimeo offers privacy settings that users can use to determine who can and can't access

their videos, the RQY videos were made public and can be accessed by anyone. RQY

also made all but one of the videos available for download, so even if the videos are taken

down by the organization they could still be accessed by those who previously

downloaded the file. Although there is the option to post comments about the videos, so

far only "The Rest of Us" has any comment activity, a comment from one of the video

producers stating that she had seen the link to her video making its way through Tumblr

posts.

Conversations

The goal of the following section is to place the discursive themes into

conversation with the contextualizing elements identified earlier. By bringing the themes

and elements together, I was able to explore their relationship to one another, and the role

that the contextualizing elements play in the construction of discourses within the videos.

The following section is divided into the following conversations: (a) sexual and gender

identity labels; (b) unspoken discourses: reinforcing queer universality, (c) cyberqueer

materiality and technocultural space; and (d) queer technological progress.

Sexual and gender identity labels. Many of the videos examined deal with

sexual and gender identity labels. I argue that the inclusion and conceptualization of

identities within the RQY videos can be linked to the contextualization elements of

culture and environment identified and discussed in chapter four.

Videos such as such as "Pro Homo," "Reel Life," and "I Am Me" all address

multiple personality traits and experiences that are unrelated to sexual identity. The

videos call for a more complex understanding of youth who hold queer sexual identities. There is a subtle distancing from sexual identity labels, as the youth in these videos are saying, "yes I'm queer/gay/a dyke/bisexual etc., but there are also all of these other parts of my life such as hobbies, my family, and what my dreams of the future are."

The videos that explore queer gender identities are actively embracing and encouraging association with non-binary gender identities such as genderqueer. "Gender Menu" explicitly offers new gender identity labels and encourages the patrons of the gender cafe to order non-binary identities from the menu. Unlike the videos about sexual identities, the videos that deal with gender identity are not challenging stereotypes or assumptions attached to gender identity; rather, they are attempting to create and define new identity labels.

I feel that the manner in which gender and sexual identities are dealt with in these texts can be directly tied to the contextual element of culture. Here I am using the term *culture* to refer to the mainstream discourses around the identities and experiences of queer youth. The distancing of personality traits from sexual identity indicates that the stereotypes and assumptions present in mainstream media discourses are causing queer youth to feel trapped into stereotypical assumptions about their experiences and desires. The youth producing the videos are in many ways challenging and resisting the heterosexual matrix, defined by Butler (1990) as a cultural web that facilitates the automatic assumption that certain bodies, sexualities, and traits are automatically linked together and that identities that exist outside of these relationships are rendered unintelligible. By challenging these assumptions, the video producers are pushing back

against the limiting representations they are speaking back to normative queer identity constructions.

As discussed earlier, mainstream media depictions of gender non-conformity are often limited to a formulaic trans narrative that involves individuals transitioning from one gender to another. This narrative did not appear in any of the RQY videos. When gender non-conforming identities were present in RQY projects they were represented as more androgynous, fluid, and existing in the gray area between male and female. RQY participants were actively and enthusiastically creating labels and spaces for non-binary gender identities. Through the depiction of such non-binary identities, the participants expanded and challenged current discourses of gender non-conformity in media texts.

I also believe that the environment contributed to how gender and sexual identity were constructed and represented in the videos. The videos were produced at a workshop that included the word *queer* in the title rather than the LGBT acronym that is often used when speaking about or to queer populations. I believe that including the word *queer* may have drawn participants who identify more strongly with non-binary identities to the program. The program's mission to empower participants and to focus on social justice through media production needs to be taken into account. The RQY participants may have been encouraged to create videos with the goal of promoting awareness and social change. I feel that the combination of the salience of queer identity and the goals and mission of the project may have impacted how sexual and gender identity were constructed and depicted in the RQY videos.

Unspoken discourses: Reinforcing queer universality. Even though the RQY videos did push back and expand on mainstream discourses related to gender and sexual

identities, there were also many experiences that were not depicted in the videos. I believe that the exclusion of discussions of intersecting identities such as race and class can be contextualized through culture and environment.

The videos spoke about a variety of experiences and challenges faced by the youth who authored them. What was not addressed were intersections of identity markers such as race, class, ethnicity, and others in relation to queer identity. When other social positions and identities were discussed, such as in "I Am Me," they were seen as adding complexity to the individual, but there was no discussion about how identifying as Chinese or Latina impacted identifying as queer. A queer identity, both sexual and gender, was represented as being a universal experience that all participants shared regardless of race, class, family structure, education, or even the biological bodies the participants inhabited. The lack of discussion about how racialized bodies experience queerness recalls Johnson's (2001) argument that "failure to ground discourse in materiality is to privilege the position of those whose subjectivity and agency outside the realm of gender and sexuality have never been subjugated" (p. 79). Johnson suggests that queer identity often doesn't take into consideration the experiences of queer individuals who are not white, Western, and upper-middle class, resulting in queer identity being depicted as if it is experienced the same way by everyone.

An argument could be made that because it appears that most of the project's participants could be read as white, this contributed to the lack of intersectional identity being discussed in the videos. The lack of intersectional identity discussions in connection with queer identities can also have ties to culture and mainstream media discourses. As discussed earlier, queer media representations tend to be overwhelmingly

white, depicting queer as a white-centered identity, and constructing queer identities in relation to white experiences. The lack of intersectional reflection on queer identities and experiences could also be attributed to the environment in which the videos were produced. Even though RQY's mission involves social justice work, the adult mentors may have emphasized their mentees' queer identities and may not have discussed the impact that intersecting identities can have on queer experiences, consequently affecting how the youth approached the content of their videos.

      Cyberqueer materiality and technocultural spaces. In this section I will examine how the contextual elements of production and platform contribute to the construction and representation of identities and experiences. I consider how web-hosted digital video projects can expand cyberqueer studies, and the potential ramifications of uploading RQY projects onto Vimeo.

      In contrast to earlier cyberqueer studies which focused on text-based identity construction mainly through the examination of web pages, comment activity, and message boards, my thesis explores identity construction through the use of web-hosted digital video. Rather than identity and experience being constructed and shared through words typed onto a screen, digital video technology has allowed for images of the body to contribute to identity construction on the Internet. The body in the planned and scripted digital videotexts examined for this project is just as much a part of the construction of identity as the words spoken and written on the screen. The contextual element of production is what has allowed for images of queer bodies to be streamed through the Internet. In addition to the actual technology that has allowed for digital video to be captured and shared on the Internet, the production process that leads to the creation of

moving images also contributes to the construction of queer identity through the body. Decisions such as who is portraying a character, who is interviewed, and how they are filmed all contribute to the construction and representations of queer identities.

The platform used to distribute RQY's videos is also an important consideration. The videos are uploaded onto Vimeo, making them available for public viewing. It could be said that posting them to a public video-streaming website allows for increased visibility of queer gender and sexual identities and contributes to the discourse regarding queer youth experiences and disruption of normative public space. However, the fact that these videos are uploaded onto a video sharing and streaming site means they become accessible to virtually anyone with an Internet connection—and that means that their content can potentially be co-opted for less than positive outcomes. Making queer bodies visible and accessible opens up the possibility of negative real life consequences, such as failing to get a job, being bullied, or having one's information collected and used for corporate profits. Gallagher and Kim (2008) reported that surveillance was a very real danger when utilizing digital video. As a researcher with no connections to the RQY organization, I was able to access the videos and use the information contained within them for my own personal use. There is no guarantee that my analysis is correct and that the discourse I've created through my engaging with the texts is not inserting damaging discourse into the knowledge about queer youth.

Queer technological progress. Like technological innovation, queer identity projects have been posited as being indicators of social progress. As authors such as Dinerstein (2006) point out, what gets labeled as progress usually indicates progress only from a white, western, masculine perspective. While the youth featured in and

constructing the texts examined for this project appear to be doing identity work that is progressive and pushing against historical notions of identify, I would like to question the idea that the kids in the videos are making true progress. Both Butler (1999) and Johnson (2001) caution against acts of subversion and disruption that also contribute to upholding normative and oppressive ideologies. While the participants of RQY appear to be empowered to share their experiences like other youth who have participated in digital video projects, they are still upholding many ideologies that contribute to oppressive structural and institutional systems. For example, just as there is little to no engagement with intersectional identities such as race or class within the videos, there is also no engagement with the colonial, racist, and sexist history contained in the equipment the youth are employing to tell their stories. While individual participants may appear to benefit from expressing identities and sharing experiences in the public forum that is the Internet, I caution against the conclusions reached by Bloustein (1998), Driver (2007), Podkalicka and Campbell (2010), Rhoades (2012), and Rodgers et al. (2010) that paint digital storytelling processes as the answer to addressing homophobia and the discrimination that results from gender non-conforming performances. I say this because there is no engagement with the dominant ideologies being upheld in the projects. Just as queer being held up as the answer to creating identity knowledges is problematic, we must be careful not to let technological participation in public discourse become seen as an uncomplicated answer to disrupting dominant discourses. While technology can be an invaluable tool, we must, as Butler (1999) and Johnson (2001) suggest, question when subversion is happening and when dominant discourses are being supported. While we may never be able to truly engage in subversive acts because we are constrained by tools

that were developed to oppress populations, I am suggesting that we inhabit queer technocultural performances as suggested by Wiegman (2012): that we do not look for a definitive correct answer to the study of identity knowledges, but instead live within the tensions and use these tensions as a space for reflection and knowledge generation.

Chapter Summary

My analysis chapter had two primary goals: to identify the themes and contextual elements present in the RQY videos, and to put the themes and elements into conversation with one another. I identified three overarching discursive themes: (a) call for more complex understandings of queer youth identities and experiences; (b) concern regarding gender binaries; and (c) change and self-responsibility. Both the call for complex understandings of queer identity and concern regarding gender binaries contained sub-points. The call for complex understanding of identity contained the following sub themes: (a) more than sexual identity and stereotypes; (b) depictions of queer relationships; and (c) writing queerness into narratives. The sub-points that made up the theme addressing the gender binary included (a) challenging the gender binary and creating new options and (b) the discrimination, isolation, and mental torment that result from identifying outside the binary. In addition to the discursive themes, I identified and discussed four contextualizing elements. The elements consist of: (a) culture, the larger media discourses concerning the experiences of queer youth; (b) environment, the RQY video production workshop where the videos were produced; (c) production, the actual production process needed to produce a digital video project; and (d) platform, Vimeo, the video sharing site that hosts the RQY videos.

The second half of the chapter placed the themes and contextualizing elements identified in chapter four into conversation with each other. I was able to identify four conversations: (a) sexual and gender identity labels; (b) unspoken discourses: reinforcing queer universality; (c) cyberqueer materiality and technolcultural space; and (d) queer technological progress. These conversations reveal that culture and environment had an impact on what how the youth conceptualize and construct gender and sexual identities, as well as what discourses are silenced. Production and platform influence what is actually able to be captured and shared through the use of digital video, while platform affects who can access the videos and the potential negative ramifications of making the RQY videos public.

In the following and final chapter I will revisit my research questions, explore the limitations of my research, and suggest ways my thesis could potentially inform future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will revisit the research questions introduced in chapter

three and the analysis and discussion presented in chapter four.   I will also consider the

implications of my findings, address the limitations of my research, and offer suggestions

for future research.

In chapter three, I proposed two research questions and outlined my methodology

for analyzing the videos produced in the RQY program. My first questions asks: What

discourses emerge when queer youth are given the resources to produce digital video

projects? What language, both verbal and visual, do queer youth use to represent their

experiences and self-identities? In what ways do the discourses created by queer youth

video projects challenge, resist, confirm, or speak to normative notions of identity? The

second question asks: How does digital video as a technocultural space shape and

influence the discourse concerning queer identities and experiences? I will address each

question in the following sections.

Emergent Discourses in Queer Youth Digital Multimedia Projects

My analysis revealed several discourses within the RQY video projects and

showed how these discourses concerning identities and experiences were constructed

through language and image; it also engaged with the relationships that these discourse

have with normative notions of identity. The discourses that emerged from the RQY

videos included a call for more complex understanding of queer identities and

experiences, concern with the gender binaries, distress and discrimination due to non-

binary gender identities, a desire for change, and the upholding of queer as a universal identity experience.

A prominent discourse in many of the texts I examined was the call for a more complex understanding of the queer youth experience, including expanding understandings of gender identity to include identities outside of the gender binary. By challenging and speaking back to assumptions and normative identity expectations, the youth producing these videos contributed to expanding what is known about how queer youths' self-identities and their lived experiences. Many of the videos pushed back against mainstream media discourses, offered solutions to limited identity labels, and allowed queer youth to participate in narratives that did not solely focus on their sexual or gender identity. This particular discourse contributes not only to adults potentially being able to better understand how youth are identifying and what they go through on a day-to-day basis, but can also be used as a starting point when considering the inclusion of queer-identified characters in mainstream media texts.

Among the more troubling discourses that emerged from the texts examined are those surrounding mental distress related to gender identity and performance. Even though we have made strides relative to the understanding of and societal inclusion of non-normative sexual identities, as the RQY participants indicated, there is still a long way to go in regard to our understanding and support of gender nonconformity. At least for this group of participants it wasn't so much sexual identity that was causing hardship but other forms of queer expression. When we speak about queer teens we often focus solely on sexual identity. The *It Gets Better Project*, for example, is addressed to gay teens, and is not necessarily associated with addressing gender nonconformity. There are

few public discourses about teens that possess a non-normative gender identity that falls outside of cis or transgender (the two identities that are most often seen in media and public discourse) which are commonly presented as the two elements in what is exclusively a binary system. For example, you were born male, identify as a boy and grow up to be a man, or you were born male, wanted to be a girl growing up, and then transitioned into a woman. In these narratives and discourses there is little to no space for gender identities that exist outside of the man/woman, male/female system. The videos I examined indicate that this is a serious, even potentially deadly problem for those who identify in this manner and that steps need to be taken to open up discourses of gender.

As adults, it is our responsibility to support and listen to youth and their self-identifications. Because the videos indicated that the youth themselves feel responsible for kick- starting societal change, we as adults need to step up and work to create cross-generational networks that support rather than hinder change that improves the lives of queer-identified people of all ages. We need to re-imagine support networks that are coalitionary rather than top- down conveyers of information. The *It Gets Better Project* is a prime example of adults attempting to support queer teens through the sharing of hopeful messages, but this mode of support is still extremely linear and top-down. The videos can potentially be patronizing as they are based on the premise of adults instructing youth. I am calling for methods of discourse exchange that are truly a group effort, that do away with adult hierarchical models of organization, and instead privilege means of communication that value and take into account all voices.

A third discourse present within the collection of RQY videos is youth coming together or taking on the personal responsibility of creating social change. A narrative involving change was present in over half of the videos I examined, indicating that social change and improving conditions for youth who identify as queer is important to the youth who participated in RQY. In all of the stories involving change, none depicted youth going to adults for help. The fact that the RQY youth came together and felt that they needed to depend on themselves in order to forge social change speaks to the youth/adult binary. Halberstam (2005) pointed out that there is often overlap between the adults and the youth they work with; this is exemplified by the RQY program in which the youth were mentored by queer adults. Even though the youth producing the videos had access to queer adults, there still seems to be a disconnect between older and younger generations. Halberstam (2012) calls out the traditional mother-daughter bond present in feminism, of the older generation transferring information directly to the younger generation, upholding norms, and participating in a patriarchal and racist historical system of knowledge production and intergenerational relationships. This parent-child relationship is dependent on, in Halberstam's case, women directly harking back to the women and knowledge that came before. While I see the importance of acknowledging and engaging with history, I feel that the pattern of youth viewing themselves as the only way that change is going to happen, and that they must push back against the labels, norms, and expectations of previous generations, is a result of the parent-child model of knowledge production and transmission. Would youth feel the need to see themselves as the saviors if, as Halberstam suggests, we refused to participate in the parent/child mode of knowledge production and instead found new ways of intergenerational collaboration?

If we (as adults) did not operate within linear modes but were more collaborative and did away with the youth/adult hierarchy, maybe youth would not feel the need to push away from adults and would instead participate in a different form of knowledge production.

A final discourse that I would like to explore is the upholding of queer as a universal experience. The videos indicate a call for change and progress to be made in how we conceptualize and understand queer identities, especially through the uses of new language such as genderqueer to describe identities, yet there is no active engagement with how racialized or classed bodies inhabit a queer identity. This points to Johnson's (2001) discussion of queer failing to account for experiences of people who identify as people of color. The lack of discourse investigating queer experiences that are influenced by bodies that are not white and upper class indicates that the notion of queer as a universal experience affecting all people in a similar manner is being promulgated within youth populations. This indicates a need to bring intersectional identities into discussion of queer youth experiences. Queer is not nearly as radical, revolutionary, or as emancipatory as it is often painted to be if it is merely upholding racist and Western values of white exceptionalism and universality in the construction of gender and sexual identities.

Technology and Queer Identity Construction

In addition to examining the discourses present in the RQY videos, a second goal of my project was to interrogate the role that digital video plays in identity construction. The use of CTDA in conjunction with discourse analysis has allowed me to examine how the context of digital video production and distribution through video streaming sites has influenced the discourses concerning queer identity. I identified four elements that can

potentially impact queer identity construction: (a) culture: the existing discourses about queer youth experiences; (b) environment: the workshop where the RQY videos were produced; (c) production: the digital video production process; and (d) platform: Vimeo, the video sharing site that allows the videos to be viewed by the public.

As discussed in chapter four, the identities and experiences present in digital video projects are often highly constructed. The identities present in the RQY videos are not spontaneous; rather, they were most likely thought through, discussed, scripted, costumed, strategically placed within the filming location, framed and shot from specific and preplanned camera angles, edited together, and had music, graphics, and special effects added. This highly constructed representation of identity differs from face-to face-identity communication. While we may carefully consider what we wear, what locations we would like to associate ourselves with, and what words we use to verbally communicate, we don't normally script out our entire days, or ask for retakes if we miscommunicate. Our interpersonal interactions are much more spontaneous and occur in the moment, whereas communication that occurs through the medium of digital video is anything but spontaneous. The highly planned and constructed nature of digital video projects offers us the opportunities to project identities and experiences in ways that give us almost complete control over what is and is not included.

A second way that digital video contributes to the construction of queer identity is through its ability to simultaneously engage with both visual and textual representations. Digital video has the ability to include both visual representations of actual people and their bodies, such as the participants who appeared on camera, as well as written text that aided in the construction of queer identities. For example, while watching "Gender

Menu" we as an audience are able to view individuals who embody non-binary gender identities, because digital video gives us the ability to take in a person's appearance, their clothing, hairstyles, body, and mannerisms. "Gender Menu" also includes written identity labels such as *genderqueer* and *tomboi*. Through the use of editing, these words can be juxtaposed with images of human bodies, potentially adding to the complexity of the meaning-making process.

This has implications for future scholarship. Specifically, I am proposing the inclusion of web-hosted digital video in future cyberqueer studies. While earlier cyberqueer research focused on the construction of queer identities through the use of written text, mainly through interactions on websites and message boards devoted to queer interests, digital video creates the opportunity for identity construction through written text to be combined with images of actual people, places, and bodies.

A third way that digital video potentially affects identity construction is through its ability to be uploaded to video sharing sites. Digital video projects uploaded to such sites become accessible to anyone with the capacity to get online, moving the videos from private to public status. The Internet has enabled queer youth to participate in the public discourse about queer youth by allowing their stories and experiences to be viewed by those outside of the community.

However, entering the public discourse can have potential drawbacks. Several of the authors referenced in chapter two discuss the limitations of posting videos on the Internet. Vivenne and Burgess (2013) discussed the tensions present in adult digital storytellers about how much of themselves to reveal online, and how this impacted how they told their stories. The tension rose from the desire to tell their stories and the

potential dangers that could come from sharing and making certain identities public. The

authors emphasized that although identity construction was taking place in cyberspace,

there were potential negative repercussions that could affect participants in the face-to-

face world. Gallagher and Kim (2008) also spoke about the potential consequences of

surveillance and exploitation that could result from the use of digital video.

I see queer youth entering public discourse and contributing to knowledge

production in both positive and negative ways. By posting videos such as "Gender

Menu" or "Paranoia" the participants of RQY can potentially change how we view and

speak about gender identity, which can have material implications for those who hold

queer gender identities. For example, more awareness of non-binary gender identities

may lead to changes in access to public restrooms, or might lessen the stigma attached to

people identifying outside of the gender binary.

Although I see youth participating in public discourse as potentially having

positive effects, several negative ramifications are just as possible. In the video "Pro

Homo," the youth in the video speak out against stereotypes related to the identity labels

dyke, femme, and *bisexual*. I believe that because these three labels have a fairly

significant presence in discourse surrounding identities outside of the queer community,

assumptions and stereotypes have been become associated with such labels , resulting in

the video participants feeling the need to speak out against them. So while making public

identity labels and discourses about non-binary gender identities, the youth in these

videos are at the same time opening up the labels to be taken up and redefined in public

discourse, ultimately removing the control that queer youth have over their use. I see

this as relating to Wiegman's (2012) argument about the shift from women's studies to

gender studies. Although *gender* as a label is seen as being able to achieve political aspirations that the label of *women* was not, it too will ultimately fail and be replaced by yet another descriptor. So while the various queer gender identities presented in the RQY videos appear to be engaging in politically motivated work, if they are taken up in public discourse they will begin to lose their original connotations; should that happen, newer labels will need to be developed or works such as "Pro Homo" will be necessary to dispel the stereotypes and assumptions that will ultimately become attached to the identity labels.

Limitations and Future Implications

To conclude, I will reflect on the limitations of my thesis as well as suggest ways that my project could contribute to future research.

Although the Internet and streaming video allowed me to explore and analyze videos that were produced several states away from my current residence, there were still limitations to my project. Because I was unable to interview the videos' producers and mentors about their motivations and processes, I was completely dependent on what I could ascertain from the videos posted on RQY's website. I did not have access to the youth participants, adult mentors, or the program's organizers. The group of youths who produced the video also was extremely small, and all lived in a part of the United States that is known for and celebrates its "progressive" politics. Although the participants all appeared to identify as queer in some way it was not always clear what specific identities they represented. Also, the majority of the video participants could be read as white, reinforcing the overrepresentation of white experiences in media texts about queer lives. The experiences and identities of the youth I focused on for this project can in no way be

generalized to larger populations; however, my findings can be used as a jumping-off point when exploring the needs and experiences of queer youth, and can also be useful in the interrogation of technology's role in the construction of queer identity.

Another limitation is that I did not analyze audience reactions to the RQY videos. Vimeo, the video-hosting site where the videos are located in cyberspace, does offer the option for people to comment on the posted videos, but currently there are no conversations visible on the RQY video pages. I believe that combining analysis of digital web-hosted video content with analysis of the comments and conversations published alongside the videos can add a deeper layer of understanding to cyberqueer identity studies.

Despite the limitations of my project I feel that it can contribute to future research. I believe that my project has the potential to begin to expand the study of experiences and challenges present in the lives of queer youth, as well as to the study of queer identity construction more generally. Moreover, the project shows how cyberqueer studies can include newer media technologies. One contribution of my study was that it documented emergent discourses about how queer youth conceptualize identity and share their experiences through a mediated form. I believe my findings could be built upon to further interrogate queer youth experiences. Future studies, for example, could explore the themes I identified through other research methods such as interview studies; such interviews would make connections between what the youth are communicating in their videos and how they describe their identities and experiences in face-to-face interactions.

Another contribution of my study is the finding that, for this limited group of texts at least, queer is viewed as a universality. While authors such as Johnson (2001) have

critiqued the tendency to construct queer as a universal experience, the fact that queer universality is being constructed in the RQY videos indicates a need to engage youth who identify as queer in dialogues about intersecting identities. I believe that future scholarship, by initiating conversations exploring the assumed whiteness in queer studies, can explore ways of engaging queer youth in conversations about multiple identities in a way that acknowledges the distress and hardships faced by inhabiting a queer identity.

Finally, I believe that my discussion of digital video technology and adaptation of CTDA as a means of analyzing and contextualizing Internet hosted digital video, can potentially expand cyberqueer studies to include overlapping new technologies. Mobile devices such as camera phones and tablets with Internet capabilities are now parts of our everyday lives. As the ease of visually documenting our experiences increases, and as we continue to blur the lines between private and public space through the uploading of images to the Internet, the construction and sharing of identities will shift to adapt to these technological changes. YouTube is full of video bloggers chronicling their experiences and Facebook now includes the option to post and upload video content. The texts I examined for this project were not spontaneous acts caught on camera, but were instead constructed and manipulated in the editing process. I would like to see cyberqueer studies address not only the carefully planned texts uploaded into cyberspace, but also the more spontaneous, everyday moments that our phones capture and we upload into technocultural spaces.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of RQY Videos

Appendix B: Videos and Corresponding Themes

Appendix A

Summary of RQY Videos

Cherry Bomb	Comical scripted fiction "Cherry Bomb" takes us back to pop singer Katy Perry's high school days and offers a re-imagining of her hit song "I Kissed a Girl." The video's main character has a crush on Katy, who ultimately ends up using the main character to get back at her boyfriend. The main character is emotionally crushed by Katy's rejection of her.
Gender Menu	Scripted fiction "Gender Menu" takes place inside a cafe that serves customers either a male or female menu based on if they're wearing pink of blue clothes. A rebel diner comes in and begins switching the menus causing confusion among diners. The cafe owner kicks out those who refuse to choose a menu, resulting in a protest. The video ends with the café under new management offering its customers non-binary options such as genderqueer, agender, transgender, and boi.
I Am Human	Scripted fiction "I Am Human" begins with an androgynous presenting individual walking down a bright street. A voiceover states that the person used to let society push them around. The film cuts to a dark room where the individual is faced with two characters representing society and judgment that insist on knowing if they are a boy or a girl. The person pushes through society and judgment stating, "I am human."
I Am Me	Non-fiction montage "I Am Me" consists of medium close up shots of several individuals who are describing facets of their lives and identities such as camp counselor, brother, artist. Next, a black screen with the words "I am more than" appears followed by identity labels such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer flash across the screen. The video ends with participants stating the phrase "I am me."
In the President's Shoes	Mock scripted news interview This video is a fictionalized interview with a future president who is queer and has a trans partner. Throughout the interview the title character indicates that he hopes to create positive changes for the LGBTQ community, and the possibility for change is what excites him most about his position as president.
Make Your Own Montage	Scripted superhero story with voice over "Montage" updates the superhero narrative to include queer

	characters. The hero becomes depressed after his partner leaves him and stops fighting crime. After some encouragement from a friend the hero gets back into shape, and returns to fighting for those facing oppression in his city. The video ends with the hero walking away from the camera holding hands with the boy he rescued.
Paranoia	Scripted suicide PSA
"Paranoia" addresses the discrimination faced by those who are gender non-conforming. The main character presents androgynously and faces several moments of discrimination such as being questioned if they are in the correct bathroom, and being turned down for a job. When the main character faces moments of discrimination, the screen takes on a red tint and a shirtless boy appears on screen holding a gun to his head. The video ends with the main character committing suicide. Information for a suicide helpline is included at the end of the video.
Pro Homo	Music video
"Pro Homo" is a music video for a song written by RQY participants. The video addresses stereotypes and misconceptions about the identity labels dyke, femme, and bisexual. The characters in the video speak about the misconceptions about who they are and provide counter examples as to how they differ from expectations.
Reel Life	Nonfiction montage
Similar in style to "I Am Me," "Reel Life" also is made up of medium shots of participants edited together. Participants all state their name, their sexual identity, living situation, if they feel that they have a support system, and what it means to be a good ally.
The Rest of Us	Scripted fiction
"The Rest of Us" addresses the lack of identities outside of the man/woman binary. The video depicts several characters who are unable to enter either the men or women's restrooms. Frustrated, they come together and, using construction paper, scissors, and glue, cut out depictions of people who vary from the man and woman symbols on the restroom doors. They hang their creations on the wall with an arrow pointing up a staircase away from the gendered restrooms.
Space is a Lonely Place	Stop action animation
"Space" is the only video that does not feature live action actors. It tells the story of a lonely astronaut exploring space. He writes in his diary about his isolation before sending a request for friends into the universe. The astronaut lands on what

	appears to be an uninhabited planet, but after some exploring he finds a group of people and the video ends with a dance party.

Appendix B

Videos and Corresponding Themes

	Complex Representations	Gender Binary	Change and Self-Responsibility
Cherry Bomb	X		
Gender Menu		X	X
I Am Human		X	X
I Am Me	X		
In the President's Shoes	X		X
Make Your Own Montage	X		X
Paranoia		X	X
Pro Homo	X		
Reel Life	X		
The Rest of Us		X	X
Space is a Lonely Place			X

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