

### *Seeing What Queer Youth Know: A Seattle Photovoice Project*

There is a remarkable irony in the paucity of critical attention given to the role of visuality in research on queer history, culture, and experience. Although a politics of visibility (e.g. “be out, be proud”) has dominated lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBT/Q) U.S. political discourse as well as queer life for decades, it remains a starkly under-queried topic (Meyers, 2006). How, for example, is a politics of visibility manifested in social practices? How do individuals perform and ‘read’ visual practices that signify non-normative sexual identity or preferences? If visual discourse is fundamentally a collective practice, is there a social pedagogy for queer visibility and how does this cut across the multiplicity of social differences such as race and gender amongst queer-identified people? And, where a politics of visibility has been an organizing logic of identity-based politics and community, how do visual social practices impact people’s sense of belonging in different communities and different social spaces? These are some of the questions that animate *Seeing What Queer Youth Know: A Seattle Photovoice Project*, the research study and public humanities project for which I seek support.

### *Seeing What Queer Youth Know As a Research Study*

This is a case study based in Seattle using the participatory action research method of photovoice<sup>1</sup>. Photovoice was first articulated and developed for the social sciences by Wang and Burris (1997) and draws upon scholarship and practices in feminist theory, education for critical consciousness, and documentary photography. In brief, photovoice involves recruiting participants, facilitating group discussions about shared community topics or issues, and using photography as a tool for critical thinking and expressions to explore these issues in a group setting; at the end of about a six months of discussion and training on basic photography skills, the group collaboratively organizes a public exhibit displaying selected photographs (the ‘photo’ component) to be accompanied by brief written comments by the photographer/participants (the ‘voice’ component) intended to convey the context and/or the photographer’s intended meaning. Thus, the aim of this method is to utilize the broad accessibility of photography to engage members of communities with otherwise limited access to public and academic discourse. Because LGBT/Q adolescents and young adults are marginalized by their age and dependent legal status, as well as the taboo of exploring non-heterosexual sexuality, they oftentimes lack the tools, skills, and platform to contribute to public dialogue; a problem that this project is intended to address.

Where the exhibit will provide engagement with public dialogue, the research aspect of the study provides one means by which the participant’s experiences, vision, and reflection will engage academic audiences. Data collected from the project will include the photographs, field notes, unstructured

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<sup>1</sup> A Human Subjects Committee Review Application has been submitted for this case study and is currently under review.

interviews, and public comments on the exhibit, which, along with my analysis, will be written in my dissertation and, with luck, subsequent conference presentations and articles in peer reviewed journals. As an interdisciplinary scholar, my research is situated at the crossroads of several fields, thus, I will seek to publish this research in one or more of the following: Youth Studies, Visual Studies, Feminist Studies, Queer Studies, Public Humanities and Culture, and/or Critical Discourse Studies.

This is one of two case studies in my dissertation, *Seeing What Queer Youth Know: Visual Epistemologies of Race, Sexuality and Gender*. The first case study, which I have almost completed, is a discourse analysis of the largest media producer for a LGBTQ young adult audience called YGA (Young Gay America). Based out of Halifax, Canada, YGA has produced a documentary, art exhibit, website, and the only nationally and internationally distributed print magazine for LGBTQ identified young adults. Included in my case study will be interviews with the (adult) editorial staff and (youth) writers of the magazine in reflecting on their stated difficulty in creating media made for large scale distribution and profit that also provided ‘representational’ or realistically diverse images. The purpose of the YGA case study is to capture and analyze a broader picture of visual representations of LGBT/Q young people that are both enabled by and reproduce national, an even transnational, imaginaries. In contrast, in this case study, *Seeing What Queer Youth Know: A Seattle Photovoice Project*, I ask: If given the tools, how might LGBTQ young people visualize themselves and their communities? Taking a group of young people in Seattle as a case sample, this case study will be ethnographically informed and provide richly textured data about how young people image/imagine themselves in relation to communities including their in-depth reflection on actual visual practices in their lived experience.

### ***Seeing What Queer Youth Know As a Public Humanities Project***

In this project, I will recruit a small group of young adults between 14-20 years of age in the Seattle area who self-identify as LGBT/Q or other consonant terms with which they are comfortable. I have several years experience in working with LGBT/Q young adults in Seattle doing recruitment, workshops, event organizing, and case management. As a youth advocate at the YWCA, I did constant program recruitment in schools, churches, housing programs, as well as King County Youth Detention. I worked in neighborhoods across downtown, central, and southeast Seattle; the majority of my program participants were young people of color, about three quarters of whom identified as heterosexual. Working as a panel discussion facilitator for the American Friends Service Committee LGBTQ Youth Program has provided me with an opportunity to focus on working exclusively with LGBTQ identified young people, though still a diverse group in regards to race, gender and class. In addition to volunteer community organizing over the past ten years, I have been built connections to a wide range of local

social service programs for queer young people locally. In fact, one impetus for this project is the lack of local programs for LGBTQ young people that center on reflective dialogue about community practices and/or promote their engagement with a broader community. A common grievance from LGBT/Q identified people with whom I have worked is that, despite the growing number of programs to serve them (though still only a handful and mostly based around mental health and support), the majority of programs sequester young people from the adult community. The reasons behind this practice are surely complicated, involving legal restrictions (e.g. legal drinking age) as well as cultural.

For a six month period, we will meet twice monthly to learn basic photography skills and engage in facilitated discussions around themes of visibility and community belonging. Each meeting, participants will identify themes arising from the photographs and reflect on the processes involved in taking them. Participants will then decide on a theme to explore photographically for the next meeting. For this project, each participant will receive a Holga camera, a small medium format plastic camera (approximate retail value \$37.00) and film. Used by professional photographers and students, the benefits of this camera are that it is fairly simple to use, allows (in fact, requires) participants to understand basic lighting, and offers unique effects that allow for a range of aesthetic choices – benefits not found in low-end digital cameras. The conceptual framework guiding participant’s photography will focus on three functions: the photographs should be used to explore: 1) Their own relationship to community and how it is impacted by visual practices of seeing and ‘being seen/read’ as visible or invisible 2) What they perceive to be important issues related to visibility in the community 3) How to produce an art installment intended to stimulate reflection and dialogue in the viewer through the photo content, aesthetics, and accompanying text. Although the discussions will include reflection on the process, participants will also keep a journal about their experience in group discussions, the themes addressed, as well as on the process of taking photographs. Participants will co-own copyright to their own photographs, as well as the prints, thus providing the opportunity to use them for personal use or other projects after the study.

With the assistance of an undergraduate student intern, the group will collaboratively produce a public photovoice exhibit that will include one to two photographs by each participant with accompanying comments. During the opening reception, photographers will make a brief presentation to share questions to the audience for reflection and/or informal discussion. These questions will also be copied and available as a guide throughout the run of the exhibit. The meetings and exhibit will take place at Kaladi Brothers Coffee (511 Pike Street, Seattle); this venue offers a unique mixed use space which is a public gathering place which also a separate room with doors that close for a meeting space. Kaladi Brothers is located in the LGBTQ Health Center where Gay City and Verbena, two health

service programs serving local LGBT/Q communities, are housed. Thus, another audience for the exhibit will be patrons who enter the space for any of the above mentioned services.

In order to reach broader audiences as well as to archive the photographs and commentary, I will develop a website, or web exhibit if you will, for this project. As another form of public engagement, this website will include space for moderated public comment and discussion on the exhibit. Lastly, given that this project is a unique documentation of the LGBT/Q community in Seattle, and given the dearth of visual documents about LGBT/Q communities and histories, I will also encourage the participants to submit copies of their photographs to these local collections: the UW Digital Archives, the Urban Archives Project, the Pacific Northwest Lesbian Archives, and the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project. In this way, participants will have an opportunity for their work to reach audiences not yet even imagined.

### **Summary of Outcomes**

*For myself as a researcher, in collaboration with the young people in my case study, to:*

- Produce research that uniquely addresses gaps in the academic literature regarding LGBT/Q young people, visual practices in LGBT/Q communities, and public humanities research projects.

*And, for a group of LGBT/Q young adults between the ages of 14-20 in Seattle to:*

- Have the opportunity to critically reflect on and dialogue with their peers about issues that are important to them and which they have few to no other outlets for doing so.
- Learn basic photography techniques and understand photography as an artistic medium with the capacity to be used for personal critical reflection as well as a tool for addressing community issues and promoting public engagement; all of which may be done individually and collaboratively.
- Gain experience working with a group to create a community arts project, including conceptual planning as well as implementation.
- Engage in a social group of their peers in which they may choose to be ‘visible,’ or explicit about their sexual or gender orientation, or not and be treated with respect either way.

*And, to engage public audiences in Seattle and beyond through:*

- A public photovoice art exhibit in a community space produced by LGBT/Q young people aimed at reflecting on the dominant rhetoric of visibility in queer culture and politics in Seattle. Viewers will be engaged through the photography, textual commentary, the overall exhibit design, a brief viewer’s guide, and, if attending the opening reception, a brief presentation by the photographers.
- A website with the photographs and text of the exhibit with space for moderated public comment.

## Project Budget

This budget is calculated assuming 12 participants.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Purpose and Cost Breakdown</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Copying costs	Recruitment and meeting materials	\$120.00
Mailing and postage costs	Recruitment and publicity materials	\$30.00
Holga Cameras	13 Holga 120CFN Medium Format Fixed Focus Camera with Lens and Built-in Flash with Color Filter Wheel @ 39.99 each plus tax	\$545.00
Hospitality for meetings	14 meetings x \$15.00 per mtg. (Juice and light snack from a grocery store)	\$210.00
Holga split image multi-image filter set	Used for special effects; 3 x \$10.99 plus tax	\$37.00
Film	12 participants x 2 rolls per month x 5 months + 1 roll used in teaching =132 rolls x \$5.00 per roll	\$660.00
Film development	132 rolls x \$6.00 each	\$792.00
Photo enlargements for exhibit	24 18"x24" color copies of prints @ \$15 each	\$360.00
Mounting materials for exhibit	36 acid free foam core boards @ 4.50 each = \$144.00; Mounting tape @ \$36.00 plus tax	\$190.00
Catering for opening reception	\$6 per person x 40 people (food bought at a grocery store)	\$240.00
Poster design for exhibit	Designer @ 10 hours x \$20/hr	\$200.00
Poster printing	300 11x17 posters @ \$1.69 ea + tax	\$560.00
Community meeting and exhibit space		free
	<i>Total Costs</i>	<i>\$3944.00</i>

## Works Referenced

- Carlson, E. D, Engebretson, J, and Chamberlain, R.M, (2006), Photovoice as a social process of critical consciousness. *Qualitative health research*, 16 (6), 836-852.
- D' Augelli, A. & Grossman, A. (in press). Researching lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth: Conceptual, practical, and ethical considerations. *Journal of gay & lesbian issues in education*, 3 (2), 35-56.
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- Hall, S. (1997), The work of representation. In Stuart Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage, 13-74.
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- Ryan, C. (2004). *A review on the professional literature and research needs for LGBT youth of color*. Retrieved 3/7/04 from The National Youth Advocacy Coalition on-line resource database, [www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org).
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**Education:**

- Ph.D., Women Studies (expected 2010), University of Washington, Seattle, WA  
Concentration in gender and sexuality studies, feminist theories and pedagogies
- PhC., Women Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 2006
- MA, English Literature, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, 1998  
Concentration in Modernist American Literature, feminist and queer theories
- Certificate in University Teaching, Future Professoriate Program, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, 1998
- BA, English and Social and Behavioral Science/Women Studies, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, 1994

**Scholarships, Honors and Grants:**

- Crossdisciplinary Research Cluster Grant, Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle for: *Queer Worlds: A Year-Long Project in Queer Cultural Studies*, 2007-08
- Research Fellow, Institute for the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students, Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 2006

**Professional Affiliations:**

- National Women Studies Association
- Cultural Studies Association (U.S.)
- American Association of University Women

**Research and Teaching Interests:**

- Visual Cultural Studies, Youth Studies, LGBT/Q representations, queer youth/young people; feminist pedagogies and research methods, photovoice, critical discourse studies, social semiotics, public humanities

**Research Positions:**

- **Dissertation Project:** *Seeing What Queer Youth Know: Visual Epistemologies of Race, Sexuality and Gender* (Working title, due for completion 2010).
- **Primary Investigator:** *Queer Worlds: A Year-Long Project in Queer Cultural Studies*, 2007- 08, an interdisciplinary research project inquiring into the production and deployment of sexuality across spaces, scales, and disciplinary formations. This project grew out of the Graduate Queer Studies Group, which I co-founded in 2006, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.
- **Research Associate:** Office of the Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement and The Diversity Research Institute, Office of Minority Affairs, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 2007-2008. Research issues related to faculty diversity in higher education regarding institutional policies and climate as well as issues and strategies for individual faculty members belonging to traditionally underrepresented groups; help to organize events highlighting emerging research on diversity, social justice, and institutional transformation, including the DRI Senior Scholars Lecture Series and The DRI Annual Spring Conference, *Enriching the Academy: Diversity Research at the UW*, May 2008.
- **Research Fellow**, Institute for the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students, Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 2006.
- **Research Assistant:** University of Washington Women Studies Dept, Seattle, WA, 2007. Researching graduate and undergraduate program structure, department image, and teaching resources for *Introduction to Women Studies and Race, Class, Gender* courses.

- **Research Assistant:** University of Washington Learning Goals Project, Seattle, WA, 2004-05. Assisted with curricular overview and plan for restructuring the undergraduate program in Women Studies. Conducted faculty interviews; designed curricular map of learning goals for all regularly taught courses; drafted proposals for curricular assessments; facilitated the process for drafting learning goals for Introductory courses and the Senior Capstone in Women Studies via leading focus groups and strategizing sessions.
- **Research Assistant:** Working Conference on Women Studies, University of WA, Seattle, WA, January - June 2004. Assisted in organizing a one day working conference for representatives from Women Studies and Diversity Studies related programs from the greater Puget Sound region held in June, 2004.

### Teaching and Professional Positions:

- **Director, Writing Center for Comparative History of Ideas, American Ethnic Studies and Women Studies,** University of Washington, Seattle, January 2007– present. Responsible for setting up a small writing center serving three departments; hire, train and mentor undergraduate tutors; plan quarterly outreach to students and faculty; organize quarterly schedules and center locations; gather data on center use and student evaluations.
- **TA Instructor:** Women 207: Introduction to Feminist Theories, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, summer 2005 and summer 2007.
- **TA Instructor:** English 198: Interdisciplinary Writing/Social Science, Interdisciplinary Writing Program, Department of English, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 2006-2007. Taught writing courses linked with Women 200: Introduction to Women Studies and American Ethnic Studies 150: Introduction to Comparative American Ethnic History.
- **Teaching Assistant,** Introduction to Women Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, autumn, 2003 and spring, 2004. Did student grading and taught discussion sections.
- **TA Instructor,** Syracuse University Writing Program, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, 1996-1998. Writing Studio II: Activism, Politics and Culture and Writing Studio I: Exploring Issues in Community.

### Workshops and Presentations:

- **Workshop Panelist:** “Who We Are Matters: Exploring TA Diversity”, annual TA Conference on Teaching and Learning, Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, September, 2006 and 2007.
- **Workshop Instructor:** Difficult Classroom Situations, annual TA Conference on Teaching and Learning, Center for Instructional Development and Research, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, September, annually between 2005-2007.
- **Paper Presentation:** “Margins within Margins: The Politics of Identity and Representation In Queer-targeted Youth Magazines,” Media and Sexual Minorities: A GLBT Media Studies Conference, Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH, April 2006.
- **Guest Speaker,** On Writing Grant Proposals, Women 505: Feminist Publishing, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, March, 2006.
- **Workshop Instructor:** University of Washington Practical Pedagogy Speaker Series “Educational Games in the Classroom,” University of Washington, Seattle, WA, March, 2006.
- **Paper Presentation:** “What You Don’t Know Can Hurt Me: Misconceiving Race and Gender in Knowledge about LGBT/Queer Youth,” National Women Studies Association Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, June, 2004.
- **Presenter:** “What’s in a Name? Women Studies Related Programs in the Greater Seattle Area,” The Working Conference on Women Studies, Seattle University, Seattle, June, 2004.

### Departmental and University Service:

- **Member, Queer Studies Steering Committee,** University of Washington, Seattle, January 2008-present. An interdisciplinary committee tasked to propose and implement an undergraduate minor and graduate certificate in Queer Studies.

- **Member, Graduate Admissions Committee**, Department of Women Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 2006-2007.
- **Undergraduate Advisor, Department of Women Studies**, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, June 2005–August 2006. Advise department majors and minors in: curricular planning for degree requirements, departmental honors program, post degree professional and educational pathways, support and resources for students with low scholarship, and completion of senior thesis process, manage databases and records, perform outreach and recruitment; create outreach materials.
- **Member, Organizing Committee: Feminist Dialogues on Social Justice: Forging Articulations Across U.S Based Anti-Racist and Transnational Feminisms**, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, October, 2005.
- **Member, Women Studies Curriculum Committee**, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, 2004-2006. Member, subcommittee on revising department senior capstone course, 2004-2005.

### **Community and Volunteer Work:**

- **American Friends Service Committee GLBTQ Youth Program**, Facilitator for Youth Speakers Bureau, April 2006-present. Panel organizer and discussion facilitator with the GLBTQ Youth Speakers Bureau; work with young adults age 14-22 to perform community education about issues related to GLBTQ young people.
- **Co-organizer, monthly discussion salon: Connecting the University and Queer Communities**, Sept 2006 - May 2007.
- **Volunteer, Women’s Prison Project**, ICA Spanish Language Institute, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, October 2002. Provided food and activities for women and their children serving long term prison sentences.
- **Youth Advocate**, YWCA of Seattle, Seattle, WA, 2000-2003. Advocated for young people age 14-21 and coordinated services with schools, courts, foster care and other state agencies. Performed recruitment, designed and lead activities, presentations and workshops for youth in alternative schools, juvenile detention, youth centers and other social sites; set up employment internships; documented client services via case files, and monthly reports; provided one-on-one coaching for educational and employment goals.
- **YWCA Employment Services**, YWCA of Seattle, Seattle, WA 1998-2000. Assisted single parents transitioning off and sanctioned by state assistance programs to enter training and education programs, access community resources,
- **Co-Editor, PUSH Magazine**, Seattle, WA, 1999-2001. Co-founding member of *PUSH*, a grassroots volunteer-run publication for a young LGBTQ readership.
- **Community Organizer**, Seattle, WA, 1999-2001. Organized educational events including a conversation series for LGBTQ women in Seattle. Organized multiple shows and performances to raise funds for non profit organizations serving under-represented groups in local queer women’s communities.
- **Member, the Committee on Women and Art**, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, 1998. Co-organized the 7<sup>th</sup> annual Matrilineage Symposium and Art Show. Organized a week long symposium featuring over 14 artists from diverse fields including illustration, film, sculpture, music, spoken word, photography around the theme Women, Art and Change. Visiting artists included Sonia Sanchez, Cheryl Dunye, Judy Chicago, and Sue Coe.

## References:

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