

More Than Just Theatre: Queer Theatre Festivals as Sites of Queer Community Building,
Learning, Activism, and Leadership

by

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MEd Leadership Studies, University of Victoria, 2014

MA Economics, University of British Columbia, 2006

BBE Business Economics, Brock University, 2005

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ABSTRACT

Through lenses of social movement theories, queer theory, intersectionality, performativity, and performance theory, my study employed a qualitative queer(y)ing methodology to explore how three queer theatre festivals contribute to the production of knowledge and learning, community building, and leadership and activism in the queer social movement in Canada. The queer theatre festivals included the Rhubarb festival, Toronto; Pretty, Witty and GAY!, Lethbridge; and OUTstages, Victoria. Data collection methods included participant observation through festival attendance, a postcard survey, and semistructured interviews with festivalgoers, performers, and festival organizers.

Findings show that festivalgoers learned through spoken words and visuals of the performances and their embodied/somatic reactions to the performances, self-reflection, collective discourse and reflection, festival design elements, self-learning following the festivals, and from creating a performance and performing. The learning that resulted had significant impacts on festivalgoers including empathy development, therapeutic and healing benefits, a sense of hope, allyship development, and personal transformation. The festivals' wider societal benefits were found to be increased queer visibility in the communities; the power to shift societal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour; and economic benefits. The study sheds light on the leadership potential of queer cultural activists and artists (artivist-leaders) as it reveals how the festivals' act as powerful cultural producing sites with individual and social transformation and learning possibilities. Finally, the study's findings provide evidence that rejects the claim that a new queer social movement exists and is distinct from the traditional gay and lesbian social movement.

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I am indebted to you all and am extremely grateful!

DEDICATION

I

dedicate this
research study to the queer
freedom fighters—activists, leaders,
performers, and *artists*—who have served
and continue to serve their fellow queer communities,
and who through their extraordinary courage, empathy, and passion
seek to bring about a more just society for queers to live and for the next
generation to flourish. Let's continue to stand up, be loud and proud, and fight for change!

FRONT OF HOUSE SPEECH

While sitting in her apartment, Helen, a 42-year-old English teacher recounted the tragic murder of a queer student from her school:

When I first heard the news. Was that four years ago? God! I was angry. More than angry. Deflated and shaking and sucker punched. How could anyone not be? You don't want to see that on the news. You don't want to hear that at all, but you at least want someone to phone you and tell you that your life has changed. And yet it's no different even now. Lives are ruined. They only become moreso. And it was a harmless game, really. Girls play it in the schoolyard all of the time. Kiss and tell. Worse, nowadays. Coloured bracelets that represent all kinds of lewd so-called accomplishments. This was rather innocent by comparison. Even for him. Just a valentine. Just "be my valentine." Nothing big. What's a valentine to a boy? A funny little valentine becomes a domino to something bigger than all of us. And then a child is no more. At least in body, but he has come to exist in so much more—in thoughts and voices in late nights of disrupted sleep, sweat-stained sheets because the body feels the stresses of an atmosphere riddled with vibrations, these tiny ripples that tell us that something's not good, the universe is sending the message, our brains, our tears, our hearts feel it and the message is clear: Something has to change. (Deveau, 2012, p. 26)

On Tuesday July 7, 2015 at 19:40, I entered Intrepid Theatre Club in Victoria, British Columbia—a small black box theatre with a capacity between 45 and 55 if packed tight—for two play readings that launched the inaugural OUTstages festival. It was my first queer theatre festival experience and the first of its kind on Vancouver Island. I was not aware such festivals existed until Intrepid Theatre announced their festival several months prior.

Entering alone, my introverted self overpowering my extroverted tendencies, I walked straight to the bar to grab a beer to socially lubricate. Often just holding a drink can awaken the extrovert in me. A few months prior, I had been elected Vice President of the Board of Directors of Intrepid Theatre. Naturally, after grabbing my beer, I gravitated toward fellow board members to make small talk before entering the packed theatre. While waiting for the first play reading to begin, I shared mutual gazes with people entering the theatre and with those already seated. Some of the male gazes may have reflected an underlying sexual motivation, locating men as both objects and subjects, but they signified more than just lust. The mutual gazes confirmed the queer modality of the event and empowered my queer self to be visible, to be open—and to relax—as if I were in the comforts of my own home.

Something magical unfolded right in front of me over the next hour and a half as we listened to the play readings. I felt united with the entire audience and felt part of something greater than myself. I was particularly impacted by the second play reading, *My Funny Valentine*, about the murder of 15-year-old Lawrence King who was shot by a male classmate after asking him to be his Valentine. Through a series of moving monologues with characters who bore witness to this tragic event, the audience shared moments of laughter, feelings of discomfort, and moments where we were moved to tears. It was a shared experience as we exchanged our complex emotions. As a queer activist with hopes of advancing the queer social movement to resist isolation and to achieve a larger social justice community where queer individuals can live and where the next generation will flourish, I was especially moved by the monologue of King's teacher, Helen. Through their sustained grief, self-blame, and feelings of confusion and helplessness, Helen attempted to turn the tragedy into progress and provided a sense of hope for a better future.

Exiting the theatre, mixed emotions followed. As someone who was bullied, albeit not to the point of death, I had lived a version of this story and connected with many of the characters. It was the first time I was learning about this tragic event and I had numerous questions. The bar in the lobby remained open following the show, and many audience members stayed behind to have drinks (alcoholic and otherwise) and socialize. As the drinks flowed through an energized crowd, so too did the conversations. Audience members gathered in small groups, forming organic sharing circles. In the sharing circle that I was a member of, we connected with each other about the experience we had just witnessed. Together, we made sense of the script and shared personal stories about our struggles of being queer in our heterosexual worlds. In one version or another, many of us had similar lived experiences.

There was a great sense of queer politics and community in the air. New friends were formed that night, and for the next 4 days of the festival, audience members would follow each other from one venue to the next. With each performance I saw, I made lasting connections with audience members and performers, and I continued to learn, remember, reflect, and imagine a world of greater equality and acceptance for queers. Catherine Hernandez's play, *The Femme Playlist*, educated me about the difficulties children with queer parents face in today's society and provided me with an opportunity to reflect on past body shame issues and my personal guilt, fear, and anxiety about masturbating as an adolescent. It was because of my "Catholic guilt," as one of my first male partners often jokingly said to me every time I would rush to shower following sex.

Blurring the line between fact and fiction, Anthony Johnston and Nathan Schwartz's play, *A Quiet Sip of Coffee*, taught me about the lived experiences of gay conversation camps. During Ivan Coyote's *Tomboy Survival Guide*, many audience members wiped tears away as

Ivan told their autoethnographic story of being trans. At times, I squirmed in my chair at the realization of how I have been complicit in the discrimination trans people face. Though Ivan did not outright make political demands on how society should change, they left me feeling responsible to forge a new future and to continue my activist work.

Stewart Legere's *Let's Not Beat Each Other to Death*, a performance about the murder of Halifax gay rights activist Raymond Taavel—whom I had personally known—had a similar impact on me and the audience as Ivan's show. While volunteering for Ottawa Capital Pride, I met Raymond in 2007 at the annual Fierté Canada Pride Conference. As soon as an audience member entered the fog-induced theatre space, death (i.e., a Grim Reaper) stood centre stage and was a reminder of the violence queers face daily. It reaffirmed why us queers must continue to act up. The created dance party with the audience that culminated the performance gave me the opportunity to interact with other audience members and to share my knowledge of the tragic event, and of Raymond's activist work with Halifax Pride and Fierté Canada Pride. This act of remember and sharing Raymond's story provided me with a sense of healing.

In addition to the four theatre performances and two play readings, the 2015 OUTstages festival included a free event called *Pride Playground* held during the Victoria Pride parade where participants made costumes, painted their faces, and glittered their bodies while being entertained by musicians and storytellers; several social events for audience members and performers; and concluded with a queer cabaret. On two occasions, the social events led to a group of about 10 of us heading to the local queer bar for a night of dancing. It was “a party with politics” (Browne, 2008, p. 65). The alcohol was flowing, and we grinded on the dance floor to

the likes of Madonna, Lady Gaga, and other queer icons. Friendships were made not only through our common experiences of the theatre performances, but also through partying.

As a festivalgoer, I quickly learned OUTstages was more than just a theatre festival. As the festival came to an end, I felt energized, empowered, more “woke,” and motivated to continue my queer activist work in the community. My inner queerness had been awakened and when I was asked at the last minute to be a volunteer bartender for the cabaret that culminated the festival, I gladly accepted. In the spirit of the festival, I attempted to disrupt expected gender roles by displaying the fluidity of gender through my appearance (see Figure 1). It was an opportunity for me to explore gender presentation—to be an outlaw to heteronormative culture—with the hopes that my external visual appearance would open the minds of others. Equally, drawing from hooks (1994a) it was an opportunity for “celebrating and affirming insurgent intellectual cultural practice . . . symbolically a red door—an invitation to enter a space of changing thought, the open mind that is the heartbeat of cultural revolution” (p. 7).



Figure 1. My bartending outfit for the OUTstages Cabaret, Sunday July 12, 2015.

Over the course of the festival, I wondered what other queer theatre festivals were like and about the experiences of audience members. To what extent were others personally impacted? Did others learn and heal as a result of attending these festivals? Did people feel more

connected to the local queer community? Do “queer acts of remembrance, witnessing, and mourning, necessarily become ritualized through performance, just as they perform get linked to local manifestations of grassroots activism” (Dickinson, 2007, p. 142)? These lingering questions led me to a year-long project of traveling the country to attend other queer theatre festivals to understand the impact these festivals had on others and the wider queer community. The following personal poetic utterance summarizes my experience at the first OUTstages festival.

A Queer Playground

I went there to be entertained and for the social
for my love of theatre

I was entertained
but
the entertainment
the social
became secondary

I learned
about
the workings of gay conversion camps
the unique struggles single queer mothers face
the murder of Larry King who just wanted a Valentine . . .
Will you be mine?

From
trans, two-spirit, lesbian, gay, nonbinary, women, men, people of colour . . .
QUEERS

I was reminded
of
a past activist—friend—whose life was taken far too soon
the darker days of my life
the bullying, anxiety, the stress I endured

I met new friends and reconnected with others
I partied—We partied
we danced, sang, and the alcohol flowed

We connected
A community was forged that week

a tight-knit collective of united friends, new and old

It was a space where we were free and could create freely

The nasty world outside was just a memory
the new liminal world was more colourful, accepting . . .
More diverse

The inner radical had risen
fuck it
I will write my own script
I will shut out that voice inside saying I can't
No . . . No . . . No!

I WILL
wear high heels and make up
queer and sexualize my body
I want to
I have always wanted to

The Queer Social Movement in Canada: A Brief History¹

Queer festivals are grounded in and spring from the queer social movement. I have been a part of this movement many years, and it is one of the greatest and most successful of the late 20th century. With a goal of eliminating heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, patriarchy, and sex and gender roles, many queer social movement organizations were born out of the activist era of the late 1960s to the mid 1980s and have played an instrumental role in fostering greater equality and social acceptance for queers (Gross, 2003; Mazur, 2002; Smith, 1999). The Stonewall Riots of 1969 are considered a major catalyst of the gay liberation movement for civil rights in North America (Smith, 1999). The riots between trans people, queer people of colour, drag queens, gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and homeless youth with the New York Police Department in the wake of a police raid of the Christopher Street bar in Manhattan's West Village lasted 6 days (Franke-Ruta, 2013). As Jagose (1996) rightfully argued, however, the

¹ While there are many historical events that have impacted the queer community in Canada, only a few have been selected for brevity.

Stonewall Riots serve as a “mythological date for the origin of the gay liberation movement” (p. 30), as other prior events helped shape the foundation of the movement. For instance, police raids on gay bars were routine in Canada too in the 1960s, as were smaller riots, although they did not receive nearly as much media attention nor were they as brash (Gorton, 2009; Hillman, 2011; Stryker, 2008). Unlike the smaller riots, the Stonewall Riots were a tipping point that forged a greater sense of queer community, and “it electrified the gay and lesbian activists who would lead a historic wave of community organizing” (Gorton, 2009, p. 6). The riots gave rise to the modern Pride movement as activists organized public marches to mark the anniversary of the event (Markwell & Waitt, 2009) and “encapsulated the rhetoric of ‘gay pride’ and the provocation for others to ‘come out of the closet’ and take to the streets” (J. Taylor, 2014a, p. 29).

During the same year as the Stonewall Riots, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and his liberal government passed Bill C-150 (1969) that partially decriminalized homosexual acts between consenting adults in private. The public arrest and conviction of Everett George Klippert in 1965 for gross indecency involving nonviolent sexual acts with men gave way to the introduction of the bill (McLeod, 1996). Klippert was the last Canadian to go to jail for being gay, and he was released in 1971.

Motivated by the Stonewall Riots, the passing of Bill C-150 (1969), and with the Klippert ordeal fresh in people’s mind, the first gay and lesbian protest in Canada, known as “We Demand,” took place on Parliament Hill on August 28, 1971 (Tremblay, 2015). Carrying campy signs with messages like “Hire a Queen” and chanting “Two-Four-Six-Eight! Gay is just as good as straight!” (Lewis, 1971, para. 1) protestors walked to Parliament Hill in the pouring rain to show their support of a brief called “We Demand” submitted to the federal

government a week earlier (Lewis, 1971). The brief was a 13-page document demanding equality for gays and lesbians in matters related to criminal justice, employment in the federal service (e.g., Armed Forces, government, Royal Canadian Mounted Police), marriage, immigration, child custody, age of consent, and all other legal rights that existed for heterosexuals (Tremblay, 2015).

As a result of these events, gay and lesbian organizations sprouted up across the country. This is not to suggest Canada did not have organized gay and lesbian organizations before this time. It is important to recognize a gay and lesbian community in Canada was growing prior to the Stonewall Riots and the We Demand protest. McLeod (1996) provided a detailed annotated chronology of the gay liberation movement in Canada from 1964 to 1975.² The seminal publication highlighted Canada already had an organized homosexual movement, albeit not as strong. The growing homosexual movement and community building in Canada prior to the Stonewall Riots was due in part to queer periodicals that provided stories and portrayed positive images of homosexuals such as the weekly tabloid paper *Tab* that began in 1964; the tabloid *Gay* in Toronto started in 1964; and other periodicals in 1964 that featured articles with a positive worldview of homosexuals such as Maclean's, CBC, and the Toronto Telegram. Soon after, there were theatre plays about homosexuals (e.g., *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, a play by Toronto writer John Herbert that opened off-Broadway in 1967); films about homosexuals (e.g., Claude Jutra's film *A tout prendre/Take it All* and Pierre Patry's film *Trouble-fête* that both opened in Montreal in 1964); and private and underground bars and clubs that welcomed and catered to homosexuals (e.g., the St. Charles Tavern and the Roman Sauna Baths opened in Toronto, Bastion Inn Pub in Victoria, the Abbotsford Hotel Bar in Vancouver, and the Bytown Inn Tavern

² McLeod (1996) noted many people mistakenly claim the liberation movement in Canada began with the Stonewall Riots.

in Ottawa that all opened in the early 1960s). In addition, political and religious LGBT allies began to emerge such as Member of Parliament Arnold Peters of the New Democratic Party of Canada who introduced, although unsuccessfully, a private Member's bill to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults in 1964, and Reverend Mervyn Dickinson, pastoral counsellor at two United Churches in Toronto, who declared that the church should accept and welcome homosexuals.

Several major events in the early 1980s, namely the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Toronto and Edmonton Bathhouse raids, and the passing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) that left out discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, brought about a wave of new gay and lesbian liberation groups in Canada (Knecht, 2011; Smith, 1999; Tremblay, 2015). The HIV/AIDS epidemic, initially referred to as gay pneumonia, gay cancer, and the gay plague, led to the formation of several activist and advocacy groups in the early 1980s, such as the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT), the Canadian National Task Force on AIDS, and AIDS Vancouver (Picard, 2018). The Toronto Bathhouse raids in February of 1981 that resulted in 304 gay men being arrested and publicly outed and humiliated, was another important event in Canadian history, and is considered Toronto's equivalent of the 1969 Stonewall Riots (Bradburn, 2018). Similar to the bathhouse raids in Toronto, the raid on Edmonton's bathhouse, the Pisces Spa, in May of 1981 that resulted in the arrest of 56 men also "became a major politicizing moment" that empowered the LGBTQ community to fight for their individual rights and civil liberties (Korinek, 2018, p. 377).

The introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada in 1982, and particularly Section 15 that guaranteed equality of rights, was influential in changing the political opportunity structure of the gay and lesbian movement (Smith, 1999). Though the movement

was more focused on HIV/AIDS organizing from 1982 to 1985, the establishment of formal legal organizations fighting for the rights of gays and lesbians, beginning with Egale Canada (formerly Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere) in 1986, followed (Smith, 1999). Significant legal institutional change for gays and lesbians occurred in 1995 because of the *Egan and Nesbitt v. Canada* case that resulted in the Supreme Court of Canada ruling that sexual orientation was de facto in the Charter; this case opened the way for other Charter challenges based on sexual orientation (Smith, 1999). In 1996, sexual orientation was added to the Canadian Human Rights Act (1985) as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. In 1998, the Supreme of Canada (i.e., the Vriend case) “decided that the failure to include sexual orientation as an illegal ground of discrimination in the Alberta Individual Rights Protection Act (IRPA) constituted a violation . . . of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (Beaudoin, 2013, para. 1). Other major legal milestones in the gay and lesbian movement in Canada include the legalization of gay marriage by the federal government in 2005, with the province of British Columbia and Ontario doing so in 2003. A recent milestone victory was the passing of Bill C-16 (2017) which amended the Canadian Human Rights Act to finally add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination and resulted in changes to the Criminal Code of Canada’s hate crimes provisions.

Another recent milestone is Justin Trudeau’s apology on November 28, 2017 to LGBTQ Canadians for the LGBTQ Purge that occurred between the 1950s and 1990s in Canada (Harris, 2017). From the 1950s to the 1990s, the Canadian government spied on, exposed, and removed thousands of suspected LGBTQ individuals from the federal public service and the Canadian Armed Forces because of perceived national security concerns (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010).³

³ Kinsman and Gentile (2010) provided a detailed overview of the impact that national security campaigns have had on the LGBTQ community in Canada.

Trudeau's apology also included a historic \$145-million compensation package for the individuals impacted by the LGBTQ purge (Harris, 2017).

ACT ONE: INTRODUCTION

The queer social movement in Canada, which has quintessentially been categorized as an identity-based movement (Adam, Duyvendak, & Krouwel, 1998; Armstrong, 2002; Bernstein, 1997; Bernstein, 2002; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Chesters & Welsh, 2011; Engel, 2001; J. Gamson, 1995; Rimmerman, 2002), has evolved considerably over time. Previously more concerned with direct forms of activism (e.g., protests, demonstrations, political rallies, and marches), the queer social movement in Canada has taken a more culturally focused direction, to a great extent through a festival framework. This change has occurred simultaneously with the increased rights and social inclusion that queers in Canada now enjoy compared to when the movement first began. This is not to suggest, however, that the queer social movement in Canada has lost energy or that queer radicals and activists have vanished. Nor is it to suggest that organized cultural events were not happening in the beginning stages of the queer social movement. In fact, the reverse is true. Since the early days of the movement, activists have used playful and cultural tactics as political tools (Shepard, 2010).

The cultural-based festival focus has elevated the movement in many ways, and radical organizations, like Black Lives Matter (BLM) that are fighting for the rights of queer people of colour, have sprouted up across the country. Further, when attacks on the queer community arise, queers are quick to organize and engage in forms of direct activism. For example, on September 29, 2018, hundreds of queers and allies organized in mere weeks to stage a counter protest against a group of people protesting against the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity policy in British Columbia schools on the BC Legislature (CBC News, 2018). Similarly, in Ontario, about 38,000 students from roughly 75 different schools walked out of school on September 21, 2018 to protest the reversion of sex-education curriculum back to 1998—a curriculum that does not

overtly address issues such as gender identity, consent, and same-sex relationships (Teotonio, 2018).

While LGBT periodicals, bars and clubs, and one-off LGBT-themed events helped establish a LGBT culture in the early years of the movement, the queer cultural-producing focus of the movement was enhanced with the creation of Pride celebrations that eventually became full-fledged festivals (Praught, 2016). The large number of Pride festivals that occur in cities throughout Canada today began as picnics. The first gay picnic occurred in Toronto on August 1, 1971 (McLeod, 1996). Vancouver held its first Pride picnic celebration in 1972 (Thomas, 2014). From August 17–26, 1973, organizations in several cities (i.e., Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax) coordinated to hold an annual national Pride Week (McLeod, 1996). This one-off festival, which included picnics, dance parties, film screenings, art exhibits, and rallies, signified the beginning of the concept of gay pride in Canada (McLeod, 1996; Praught, 2016). The politically themed cultural events sought to bring attention to the existence of homosexuals, end discrimination against gays and lesbians, and petition for the inclusion of sexual orientation in human rights codes (McLeod, 1996).

Although Pride organizations have dominated the *festivalization* of queer culture,⁴ the cultural-producing focus of the queer social movement has continued to bring about new social movement actors and organizations. For example, (a) queer youth camps (e.g., Camp fYrefly in Alberta (2004), Camp Ten Oaks in Ottawa (2004), and CampOUT in Vancouver (2010)); (b) queer sporting clubs (e.g., Out for Kicks Soccer Club in Vancouver (1991), Frontrunners in various Canadian cities (e.g., Vancouver (1982), Toronto (1987), Ottawa (2003)); (c) queer film festivals (e.g., Vancouver Queer Film Festival (1988), Reel Pride Film Festival (initially called

⁴ The term “festivalization” comes from Bennett, Taylor, and Woodward’s (2014) edited book *The Festivalization of Culture*.

Counterparts in Winnipeg (1987)) and Inside Out in Toronto (1991)); and (d) queer theatre events and festivals (e.g., Rhubarb in Toronto (1979), The Loud and Queer Cabaret in Edmonton (1991),⁵ Queer Acts in Halifax (2009; ended in 2017), The Coming Out Monologues event in Calgary (2011), Pretty, Witty & GAY! in Lethbridge (2012), OUTstages in Victoria (2015), and The Rose Festival in Montreal (2017)) have emerged on the scene over the years.⁶ One of the earliest cultural organizations was Buddies in Bad Times, which launched the first Canadian queer theatre festival in 1979 called New Faces of '79.

The queer activist era that began in the 1960s disrupted the spectrum of theatre forms and the meaning of queer theatre (Bartlett, 2002). Queer theatre companies, which create performances executed by queers for queer and ally audiences, sprang up across the country following the queer activist era (Bartlett, 2002; Niles, 2005). Queer theatre did, however, exist prior to this. As Bartlett (2002) noted:

The most continuous and the richest theatrical tradition built upon these early works has been that of the drag artists – though their work has been the least honoured and the least documented, because it is a popular (i.e., working-class) tradition, and is rarely dependent on scripts or playwrights. (p. 305)

No movement is distinct and self-contained, rather it can grow from other movements and give birth to new ones (Meyer & Whittier, 1994). Thus, before separating queer theatre into before and after the activist era beginning in the 1960s, it is important to recognize earlier queer theatre survived and has been further developed (Bartlett, 2002).⁷

⁵ Hagen (2011) produced an anthology of major works showcased at Edmonton's Loud and Queer Cabaret over the years.

⁶ The year in brackets corresponds to the year the organizations/festivals began.

⁷ Bartlett (2002) offers a summary of earlier queer theatre works.

Cultural organizations provide new ways for theorizing about social movements and their activities in general, and the queer social movement in particular. Few studies, however, have focused on these performative spaces and the sociocritical cultural learning and leadership they represent. Exploring these progressive and temporal festivals, rituals, and social sites as acts of resistance to heteronormativity as I have done provides new understandings of queer meaning making, political and cultural empowerment, community building, collective identity and identity formation, queer leadership and activism, and learning and knowledge production in the queer social movement.

Statement of Purpose

My research interest lies in Canadian queer theatre festivals and how they operate as cultural learning and leadership spaces in the context of the queer social movement. The overarching question that guided this study was: How do queer theatre festivals contribute to the production of knowledge and learning, community building, and leadership and activism in the queer social movement in Canada? This question is grounded in queer, intersectional, performance, performativity, and social movement theories and their discourse and practices of knowledge production, learning, and leadership and activism for social change. To answer the broader question of this study, the following subquestions were explored:

- 1) How do performers, audience members, and festival organizers understand the social impacts and benefits of queer theatre festivals?
- 2) To what extent are queer theatre festivals sites of knowledge production and learning?
- 3) How are queer theatre festivals contributing to the work of the queer social movement and challenging heteronormative norms of society?

- a) How do queer theatre festivals bring emerging social movement issues to the forefront?
- b) How do the festivals and performances challenge heterosexist institutions and values (i.e., do the festivals promote homonormativity or challenge it)?
- 4) How do performers and festival organizers articulate leadership, activism, learning, and social justice, and how does this articulation impact their choice of artistic expression and the work curated at queer theatre festivals?
- 5) How are queer theatre festivals impacted and/or shaped by the neoliberal cultural economy they operate?
- 6) How do queer theatre festivals mobilize and foster critical consciousness, solidarity, and a greater sense of queer community?

Sites of Analysis

To respond to my research questions, I investigated the experiences of performers, audience members, and festival organizers at three queer theatre festivals in Canada. I chose queer theatre festivals because of my personal interest in theatre and position, as noted above, with Intrepid Theatre, the lack of research on queer theatre festivals in Canada, and a curiosity around the linkages between festivals. The research sites were Rhubarb (Toronto, ON), Pretty, Whitty, and GAY! (Lethbridge, AB), and OUTstages (Victoria, BC). The Rhubarb festival, run by Buddies in Bad Times, is the longest and oldest running queer theatre festival in the world. The 39th Rhubarb festival ran February 14–18 and 21–25, 2018. Pretty, Witty, and GAY! is produced by Theatre Outré and ran from February 26 to March 4, 2018.⁸ Intrepid Theatre's OUTstages festival ran June 19–24, 2018. The three sites provided significant diversity to the

⁸In 2020, Theatre Outré changed the name of the festival to Quaint, Quirky, and Queer.

data in terms of festival size and the geographical and political diversity of Canada as well as insights into similar and diverse productions of knowledge, learning, community building, and leadership and activism.

My Vantage Point: Situating Myself

In this section, I discuss how I am relationally joined to this topic and to queer research in general. My foray into queer theatre research may be surprising considering I do not have a performing or creative theatre background. However, given my extensive involvement in the queer social movement and my interest in social movement research, I believe I can offer insights into the linkages between queer theatre festivals and the queer social movement. Further, I sought to understand the impacts and benefits of queer theatre festivals and thus refrained from critiquing the technical, textual, or aesthetic aspects of the performances that is typical in theatre discourse.

Since coming out in 2005, I have taken an active role in the queer movement, serving on the board of directors for a number of organizations, including Capital Pride, the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, the Ottawa Police GLBT Liaison Committee, Fierté Canada Pride (Canada's national Pride organization representing Canadian Pride organizations), and the Victoria Pride Society. In addition, I have volunteered with other Pride organizations, including the Vancouver Pride Society and the Cape Town Pride Festival in South Africa, and was one of several queer leaders that participated in a Canadian queer leadership mission to Israel in 2014. I have also attended several Pride festivals, pride conferences, and have been a demonstrator and protester at several major rallies. I am also quite involved in the theatre community in Victoria, and I served as the Vice President on the Board of Directors for Intrepid Theatre from April 2015 to September 2017.

As a queer activist and researcher, I am concerned with dominant heteronormative attitudes and hegemonies that impose a challenge for queer culture and ways of being. Thus, I am particularly interested in research that is analytical, community based, self-reflexive, insightful, informative, and seeks to cultivate a more just society. Though many rights have been won for queers in Canada, I believe we must continue to undress—to redress—the heteronormative attitudes and binary categories of sexuality and gender. We must all follow the emperor and disrobe to reformulate our views and to challenge the legitimacy of the binary norms that continue to marginalize and oppress individuals who do not conform to hegemonic heteronormative and gender ideals. It was thus a goal of this research to provide a basis for the application of ideas and methods that creates further dialogue on the use and impact of performance and theatre in the queer social movement. I vehemently believe “if our research does not promote some modicum of positive social change, we are at best ‘navel gazing’ and at worst, perpetuating injustice” (Phillips, 2014, p. 112).

A Note on Terminology

Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence of potentiality for another world.

–Munoz, 2009, p. 1

Words, terms, and their historical context matter—especially when dealing with marginalized populations, as does one’s privilege. Today, we are at a crossroads in that many nonheterosexuals are refusing to use firmly defined identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans, and are instead using identities that fall outside these categories, such as genderqueer, pomosexual, and pangender. The sheer number of identifiers used today presents a challenge for research that seeks to be inclusive of all identities and sexualities.

I use the term queer to “describe a diverse group of individuals who are not heterosexual, heteronormative, or gender-binary” (Ings, 2015, p. 746). The contemporary use of the term queer, with its ambiguous and unstable meaning, seeks to challenge and break down the strict binary labels associated with sexuality and gender identity that promote exclusion (Butler, 1990; Fuss, 1991; Sedgwick, 1990). The term is unaligned with any specific gender or sexuality categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (M. Warner, 2008; Shlasko, 2006;), and both Butler (1994) and Halperin (1995) caution against the normalization of the term.

Fluidity is at the core of sexuality and gender identity. Just as “heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasm of ‘man’ and ‘women,’ are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real,” (Butler, 1991, p. 21) so too are sexual identities. I believe the term queer is a more inclusive term to represent the diverse voices of nonheterosexuals and those who are questioning their sexuality and gender identity. I, like many others, have intentionally chosen to use queer as a way of reclaiming it. I also appreciate the term for its intersectionality, which aids in creating and building a wider community for nonheterosexuals. The problem with the terms homosexual, gay, lesbian, or acronyms like LGBT+, LGBTQ, LGBTQQIAAP (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Allies, and Pansexual), is that they are restrictive and ignore the fluidity of gender and sexuality. The term queer overcomes this problem. An exception to the usage of the term queer in this dissertation applies when discussing specific historical events or literature that make use of terminology used during such times (i.e., gay, lesbian), as was the case in the section “The Queer Social Movement in Canada: A Brief History.”

I am aware the term queer has had an extensive history as a derogatory term to describe a male homosexual (Pigg, 2000). While academic communities and some activists have attempted

to reclaim the word, I understand this word remains derogatory to some people today, and some activists and nonheterosexuals refuse to adopt the term (M. Warner, 2008). Thus, I am cognizant and empathetic to those individuals who are negatively affected by the term. Further, despite the extensive usage of queer in academia, I recognize the privilege that comes with being able to use this term freely. My hope is that those affected by the term will understand and appreciate its use in the context of this dissertation as a term that places a greater emphasis on fluidity to allow for the self-discovery, self-realization, and self-affirmation many nonheterosexuals, such as myself, experience throughout their lives.

To study the impact that queer theatre festivals have on building a sense of community, it is necessary I offer a definition of what is meant by sense of community. Various interpretations of a sense of community exist in the literature. Derived from the Latin word *communitas*, a sense of community infers a group of people who share a sense of shared spirit and structure (Beeton, 2006). The various definitions of a sense of community often include several dimensions: (a) empowerment; (b) the existence of mutual interdependence among members; (c) a sense of belonging, connectedness, spirit, faith, and trust; and (d) the possession of common expectations, shared values, and goals (Beeton, 2006). Similarly, McMillan and Chavis (1986) stated a sense of community is a perception based on four psychological dimensions: membership, influence, meeting needs, and a shared emotional connection. McMillan and Chavis's definition is widely used and is the basis of the Sense of Community Index, a frequently used quantitative measure used in the social sciences (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008). Therefore, a sense of community is understood in this paper according to the dimensions identified by Beeton (2006) and McMillan and Chavis (1986).

Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks

As noted earlier, this study was grounded in social movement theories, queer theory, intersectionality, and performance theory and performativity. In this section, I introduce these theoretical and analytical frameworks as a detailed discussion is provided in Act Two.

Social Movement Theories

The queer social movement has quintessentially been classified as an identity-based new social movement (J. Gamson, 1995; Holst, 2002). New social movements differ from traditional ones in that they view “identities, and groups organized around them, not as hierarchical, but as multiple and overlapping” (Esterberg, 1994, p. 440). Central to new social movements is collective identity and identity politics, symbolic and social capital, and cultural transformation (Bernstein, 2002; Diani, 1997; Finger, 1989; Melucci, 1985). Further, new social movements are also concerned with individual transformation that occurs through informal adult education (Finger, 1989). As Finger (1989) explained:

[New social movements] view the individual seriously, seeing ~~him or her~~ [them] as the basis and the only unit of social and cultural transformation. The transformation in the individual’s way of living as well as in ~~his or her~~ [their] thinking is the only and the ultimate criterion against which the success of adult education will be judged. Adult transformation is therefore mainly informal, local, and communitarian, based on concern, commitment, and experience, rooted in and contributing to the development of a local culture. (p. 18, emphasis added)⁹

⁹ In this dissertation, I use a strikethrough to denounce the use of binary pronouns in quotes. In addition, rather than stating “emphasis added” after each time I emphasize a specific word(s) in a direct quotation, I write it at the end of the quote for simplicity and aesthetic purposes.

In discussing learning in social movements, Holst (2018) indicated social movement learning that occurred in new social movements sought to make individuals more critically conscious and was centred more on personal transformation rather than mass societal transformation. These theories associated with new social movements (e.g., social movement learning, collective identity, social and symbolic capital, and cultural capital) were relevant for this study; particularly because they were useful for understanding the contribution queer theatre festivals have on the overall queer social movement and society.

Leadership and activism in social movements were also of importance to this study. Though traditional views of social movement leadership have been influenced by Max Weber's concept of charismatic leadership and have focused on those in formal leadership positions in organizations, this study assumed a broader understanding of social movement leadership (Eichler, 1977; Gusfield, 1966). Specifically, this study relied on the work of Eichler (1977); Herda-Rapp (1998); Barker, Johnson, and Lavalette (2001); and Gardner (2011),¹⁰ who distinguished between informal/indirect and formal/direct leaders and who recognized leadership extends beyond those with formal ties to organizations. Though I believe social movement leaders are by default activists as a result of their efforts to bring about social change, activists are not necessarily social movement leaders. In this study, I rely on Offord's (2001) definition of activism. According to Offord, activists are individuals who seek to influence state and civil society through action that may include education (e.g., leaflets), compromise, persuasion, force (e.g., protests, demonstrations), or cultural forms.

¹⁰ Gardner (2011) did not focus primarily on social movement leadership, but he did include social movement leaders in his analysis such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Queer Theory and a Queer Politic

The development of queer theory is rooted in queer social activism that sought to challenge heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia, and focuses on those excluded by heteronormative views (Grace, 2008; Jagose, 2005). Kirsch (2000) indicated queer theory “stems from the movement in theory towards postmodernism and post-structuralism” (p. 19). With a goal of problematizing and resisting heterosexual and homosexual identities, queer theory provides a postmodern critique of fixed identity and sexuality categories (Jagose, 2005; Seidman, 1994). As a result, queer theory embraces the “grey areas between the strict gender and sex roles” (Loocy, 2004; as cited in Rodgers, 2011, p. 36). Recognizing these in-between grey areas, McIntosh (1993; as cited in Whittle, 1996) stated, “queer means to fuck with gender. There are [non-binary queers, two-spirit queers, questioning queers], straight queers, bi queers, tranny queers, lez queers, fag queers, SM queers, [and] fisting queers in every single street in this apathetic country of ours” (p. 196).

Queer theory, however, is not without its critics. Adams and Jones (2011) and Halley and Parker (2011) suggested the power of queer theory lies in its practical and political, rather than its epistemological use. It is argued if everyone is queer—the ultimate goal of queer theory is to reduce the derogatory nature of the term and breakdown normative binaries—then its meaning and explanatory power is diminished. Allen (2015) argued,

it is precisely in queer’s refusal to be captured that its greatest promise lies. This reluctance to define queer is not a form of intellectual sloppiness or snobbery, but an acknowledgement that to pinpoint queer is to dilute its essence and curtail its possibilities. (p. 681)

The theory is useful for understanding and contextualizing the emancipatory and disruptive

efforts of queer performers to challenge assumptions of the hegemonic heteronormative narrative. In addition, it is useful for providing a “queer reading” of the festivals, social interactions, and the fluidity of gender and sexuality (e.g., the politics of genderfuck displays by performers and audience members).

Intersectionality

Oppression is complicated and often multifaceted. Imagine an Aboriginal lesbian woman who faces a “triple threat” of oppression: One, because they are Aboriginal, two, because they identify as female, and three because they identify as a lesbian.¹¹ In contrast to identity politics, research on intersectionality examines the intersection of multiple forms of oppression or discrimination an individual may face in a group because of other dimensions of their identity, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Fotopoulou, 2012; Singh, 2015). Rosenblum (1994) has been critical of lesbian and gay identity-based organizations that have failed to account for intersectionality, and other scholars have recognized the importance of incorporating intersectionality as a theoretical lens in studies involving queer subjects (Dawson & Loist, 2018; Douglas, Jivraj, & Lamble, 2011; N. Field, 2016). Douglas et al. (2011) broadly defined a queer intersectional research approach “as a critical ethos or approach that refuses to separate questions of gender, sexuality, and queerness, from questions of raciality [*sic*] and racialization” (p. 108). By incorporating intersectionality, this study considered the multiple identities in the exploration of the lived experiences of participants.

Performance Theory and Performativity

Though performance and performativity are intrinsically linked concepts, they also have different theoretical and disciplinary roots. Performance theory is associated with the work of

¹¹ The ordering of identities here bears no meaning.

Goffman (1959), V. Turner (1969), and Schechner (1977). Goffman explored three stages of performance (i.e., frontstage, backstage, and outside) to understand how people may behave in different settings. From everyday life activities such as rituals like weddings or sports, Schechner and V. Turner have used the theatrical notion of performance to argue all aspects of social life are governed by a code of performance. As Schechner (2013) explained:

Performing in everyday life involves people in a wide range of activities from solo or intimate performances behind closed doors to small group activities to interacting as part of a crowd. Sometimes performing in everyday life uses consciously enacted conventional behaviors [*sic*], as at a formal dinner party or a funeral; sometimes the scenario of everyday life is loose, as when you are walking down the street in casual conversation with a friend. Most of daily living is taken up by performing. . . . Everyone masters to some degree or another the social codes of daily life. Rebels intentionally break the rules; revolutionaries want to change them permanently. (p. 208)

Current understanding of performativity is most associated with Butler (1990, 1991). Central to this discourse are the political strategies using subversion through parody, displacement, destabilization, and resignification. Performativity theory was also useful for understanding the ways in which meaning making occurs, as it is through the process of imitation and repetition subjects come into being (Butler, 1993). The potential for new meaning making and learning lies in the persistence of a discursive repetitive act. Performativity, however, is not without its critics who argue the theory is too individualistic and provides an insufficient account of agency (Bickell, 2005; Crawley, 2008; Lloyd, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999; Schlichter, 2011). This criticism can be overcome by using the performative-performance lens I

employed, as several other scholars have (Bickell, 2005; Langellier, 1999; Morison & Macleod, 2013).

Methodology and Methods: A “Queer(y)ing” of Methodologies

My methodological approach, as I outline in detail in Act Three, was informed by queering and elements of autoethnography and involved the use of the aforementioned multiple theoretical perspectives and multiple data collection methods. This approach required both the noun *queer*, and the verb *queering*, to capture the multiplicities. It was in this vein I am calling for a queer(y)ing of methodologies, rather than simply a queering of methodologies. Like Alexander (2014), my approach to a queer(y)ing of methodologies, hinges off of Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz (2005) who have called for a renewed consideration of queer epistemologies that rethink “the relationship between intersectionality and normalization from multiple points of view but also, and equally important, consider how ~~gay and lesbian~~ [queer] rights are being reconstituted as a type of reactionary (identity) politics of national and global consequences” (p. 4, emphasis added)

I used a three-stage approach to data collection. The first was participant observation. As a participant, I attended as many festival performances and events as possible. Overall, I attended 51 events/performances between the three festivals. While some field notes were taken in the field, most of the notes were written at the end of each day. A second method was a postage-paid postcard survey designed and distributed at all three festivals. The postcard survey asked audience members to write a response, a poem, dialogue, or draw or doodle about what they believed were the benefits of the festival. My aim here was to gain a broader perspective from the imagination and to provide a creative outlet for an arts-loving crowd. A total of 275 postcards were handed out/taken between the three festivals and 38 were returned.

I also employed semistructured interviews with audience members, performers, and festival organizers. Interview questions focused on participants' experiences of the festival and how the festivals impacted them personally. The interviews were recorded using two tape recorders and transcribed verbatim. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used. Overall, 70 people participated in an interview, resulting in nearly 57 hours of recordings. Interviews ranged in length from 32 minutes to just over 1.5 hours.

Ontological and Epistemological Perspective

The Research GOD

He is a mighty force in the academy

He lurks the halls, not always visible to the naked eye
A constant reminder of his existence persists, like the smell of cigar-soaked walls
Often silencing those who reject Him

He has been cemented in our minds from our earliest days of school
the non-objective is often deflated to bias and unreliable
A conservative view many of us trailblazers are fighting

For He is not an all-knowing 'god'
I will not minimize the "personal and subjective process of mutual discovery"
(Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 155)
Nor will I bow down to He who sees through closed-eyes

Distancing of self ignores the retrospective gaze
A gaze that is sure to rise in research *by* and *with* marginalized populations such as queers

I hereby stand with others and reject the "god trick" (Haraway, 1988, p. 598)

To study the queer theatre festivals, I used an interpretivist or social constructivist view of the world as interpreted, constructed, and understood in the context of the lived experiences of people in their interactions with each other and wider social systems (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Schwandt, 1998). My methodological approach was therefore consistent with my ontological and epistemological perspectives for this inquiry as a queer pragmatic social

constructivist/symbolic interactionist. From pragmatism, I am influenced by theorists like Dewey, who conflated ontology and epistemology and viewed knowledge as experience (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The constructivist perspective that there are multiple realities socially created through interaction and experiences (i.e., the ontological stance) and that knowledge is cocreated between the knower and respondent (i.e., the epistemological stance) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) are also in line with my worldview. I am driven by the constructivism perspective because “one of the basic contributions of constructivism has been to expose how the body is produced within a web of taxonomical structures and binary logic” (Fragkou, 2007, p. 3) and for its macro-level perspective (Polk, 2017). In addition, the constructivist perspective “opens the doors to artful forms of inquiry where different mediums reveal different interpretations and possibilities” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 9). I am drawn to symbolic interactionism for its focus on individuals rather than social structures (i.e., its micro-level perspective) and for its concern for making sense of selves and social roles (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2006). Finally, my perspective is also guided by a queer postmodern perspective that “offers a powerful force for social change” (Atkinson, 2002, p. 73).

My Role: The Insider/Outsider and the Other

It is often difficult to separate the personal from the research. Most researchers, including myself, choose topics they are personally connected to. My personal interest and involvement in the queer social movement and my connection with Intrepid Theatre led me to this topic. As a result, I can be considered an insider in some ways. A few of the people I interviewed and/or observed while in the field are friends and/or are people I have worked with in the past. There are many advantages of being an insider, such as the ability to build greater rapport and trust with participants, having a deeper understanding of the phenomena, and a greater possibility of

the sharing of information that may otherwise be censored (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Levy, 2013). However, there are some perceived drawbacks. For instance, when participants view a researcher as an insider, they may leave out detailed explanations if they think the researcher is already aware of them (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In addition, the insider researcher may make unwarranted assumptions about participants based on their own experiences (Levy, 2013). These issues, however, were minimized in this study through a high degree of self-awareness and reflexivity (Hamdan, 2009).

Despite the perception I am considered an insider, I reject the binary insider/outsider classification. As a participant at the festivals, I fully embraced the experience. I became quite close with other festivalgoers, partied with some, and forged lasting friendships and connections with many of them. It may be true some participants saw me as an insider, but at the same time, I was an outsider and just another festivalgoer. Though I am queer, involved in the queer social movement, and a member of the theatre-going community, I am not a performer and I do not have any training in theatre production. Like Blix (2015), Kwame (2017), and Levy (2013), I believe a researcher can take on multiple and varying degrees of identities during the research process. Particularly, I agree with Kwame, who stated,

the insider/outsider discourse should not be seen as a problem of methodology, which researchers must overcome, but it should be seen as an opportunity for new insights into the co-construction of knowledge, where researchers must expose their unfinalized positions as they engage with participants in the identity performance. (p. 223)

My research process was thus viewed and carried out as a ‘cosearcher’ activity where both the participant and I engaged in meaning making of their, and my, experiences at the festival.

Academic and Social Significance of the Study

Though there is a dearth of queer theatre scholarships in Canada, it is not proportional to the amount of queer theatre in the country (Kerr, 2007). My study begins to fill this gap not by producing research that focuses on a technical, textual, or aesthetic analysis of queer theatre, but by uniquely positioning queer theatre in the context of the broader queer social movement. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no research conducted on queer theatre festivals in Canada. My research intends to fill this gap.

This research study is situated at the intersection of adult education and leadership, sociology, queer studies, and draws on the established fields of performance, cultural, and festival studies. With this positioning, the academic relevance of this study is threefold. First, this study contributes to the understanding of queer theatre festivals as essential aspects of a larger queer culture, considering queer theatre—art and art making—as a social and cultural practice (G. Turner, 2006) with potential transformative powers. Second, this study bridges queer theatre scholarship and festival studies with adult education research. As a result, the study considers queer theatre festivals as cultural events and seeks to understand their value beyond aesthetic and entertainment benefits and toward a deeper conception of queer theatre festivals as contributing to the queer social movement. Finally, this study contributes to the growing field of adult education in social movements and provides a new site of analysis—queer theatre festivals. It responds to a call from Seçkin (2016) for “researchers in the field of adult education . . . [to look] more into social movements” (p. 196).

In addition to the academic relevance, this study also has social relevance. First, the study contributes to an understanding of queer theatre culture in an era of neoliberalism. In addition, the study contributes to the conversation about the greater impact of queer theatre festivals and

consequently returns information and knowledge back to festival organizers. A greater understanding of such festivals and their contributions will prove beneficial for theatre companies and artists when completing grant and funding applications. Finally, this research may provide information that will prove beneficial for individuals who are interested in creating queer theatre festivals or other queer cultural organizations. By situating queer theatre festivals within the broader queer social movement, there are lessons new emerging queer theatre festivals and other social movement cultural organizations can learn.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized into six interconnected acts. Following this introductory act, Act Two provides a detailed review of the theoretical and analytical lenses used in this dissertation, and a review of relevant research. Act Three provides an overview of the research methodology, methods, and the data analysis process employed in this study. I provide a summary of the findings organized by major themes generated from the qualitative data in Act Four, which has been separated into three scenes. In Act Five, I provide a detailed discussion of the findings, relating these findings to the literature and identify research gaps. The final act provides a conclusion and a discussion of the possibilities for future research. The five acts and three scenes that make up Act Three, together with my acknowledgement, dedication, and front of house speech, weave together to create a single script—much like the 11 coloured segments of the redesigned Pride flag have individual meaning, but when combined represent something greater than the sum of its parts (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Designed by Daniel Quasar in 2018, the redesigned Pride flag seeks greater inclusivity by including five new colours to represent queer people of colour (black and brown) and trans people (baby blue, pink and white). Image from Hitti (2018).

ACT TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Queer research cuts across various disciplines, including queer studies, education, theatre, sociology, festival studies, history, economics, healthcare, cultural studies, and leadership studies. In this Act, I provide an overview of the literature and theoretical and analytical lenses from various disciplines relevant for this study. Rather than limiting the literature review to a small number of disciplines as is typically done, I have taken a more holistic approach by surveying all disciplines for relevant literature. I believe this is necessary for a queer(y)ing approach, an approach I will discuss in Act Three. The combination of the various theoretical and analytical lenses allows for theoretical triangulation (Denzin, 2010) and enables me as a qualitative researcher to work “between and within competing and overlapping perspectives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6).

I begin the literature review by providing an overview of relevant social movement theories including social movement learning and leadership. The literature in this area is pertinent in framing queer theatre festivals and the cultural organizations running them as queer social movement organizations. This overview is followed by an overview of relevant research related to the festivalization of queer culture. Following this, I discuss performance for social justice and related performance research. I then provide an overview of queer theory, intersectionality, and performance theory and performativity, which were also instrumental in framing this study. In discussing this literature, I situate my own research in this literature, anticipating where it might contribute and from what research it borrowed.

New Social Movements and Social Movement Organizations

New social movements, to which the queer social movement belongs, mark a movement away from classical Marxism for analyzing social action (i.e., economic and class reductionisms)

and toward action based in politics, ideology, culture, and identity as the root of collective action (Buechler, 1995; Caniglia & Carmin, 2005; Egner, 2019; Finger, 1989; Holst, 2002; Melucci, 1989). Social movements question and challenge the existing structural and political landscape in an attempt to move society toward new views, opinions, values, behaviours, and beliefs (Diani, 1992; Finger, 1989; Juris, 2014; W. G. Roy, 2010). In the past several years, there has been persistent growth in social movements and collaboration among grassroots groups in Canada (e.g., the Slut Walk, Occupy Movement, G20 Summit protests, Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, sexual orientation and gender identity [SOGI] curriculum protests in British Columbia, and “we the students do not consent” protests in favour of modernizing sex education curriculum in Ontario), including the continual growth of organizations working in the queer social movement. At the core of every social movement are individuals, collectives, and organizations attempting to bring about solutions to complex societal issues.

Though there exists an extensive amount of theoretical and empirical works on social movement theory, there is little consensus on a definition of a social movement. R. H. Turner and Killian (1987) defined a social movement as a collective group of individuals,

acting with some continuity to promote or resist change in the society . . . of which it is part [of]. As a collectivity[,] a movement is a group with indefinite and shifting membership and with leadership whose position is determined more by informal responses of adherents than by formal procedures for legitimising authority. (p. 223)

Diani and Bison (2004), who have synthesized an enormous amount of social movement literature, defined social movements as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups, or associations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity” (p. 282). They elaborated social movements are a social process

consisting of people engaged in collective action who are involved in the “presence or absence of conflictual orientations to clearly identified opponents” (p. 282). Further, they indicated social movements consist of actors linked by “dense or sparse informal exchanges between individuals or organizations engaged in collective projects” and who share a “strong or weak collective identity between members of those networks” (p. 283). Buechler (1990) who introduced the notion of a “social movement community” (p. 42) extended the theorization of a network, arguing they are informal and include individuals and groups. Other scholars have also employed the concept of a social movement community in researching social movements (Staggenborg, 1998; Stoecker, 1995; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). In this study, I take up social movements according to Diani and Bison’s definition, with the addition of Buechler’s understanding of networks and R. H. Turner and Killian’s view that membership is “indefinite and shifting” (p. 223) and leadership in the movement can be formal or informal. Specifically, the following was my working definition of social movements: Social movements consist of dense or sparse informal networks of individuals or organizations engaged in a political or cultural conflict with identified opponents (Diani and Bison, 2004). These individuals or organizations form a collective (R. H. Turner & Killian, 1987) social movement community (Buechler, 1990), share a strong or weak collective identity (Diani and Bison, 2004), and their membership in the collective is indefinite and shifting and leadership can be formal or informal (R. H. Turner & Killian, 1987).

DeFilippis (2018), who also stated the queer social movement belonged to the new social movement, conceptualized the current queer social movement as distinct and separate from the traditional gay rights movement (GRM). This view was based on the observation that queer liberation groups and mainstream gay rights organizations had different priorities and strategies

that led to ongoing tensions between the two types of organizations (DeFilippis, 2018).

DeFilippis's argument was based on the premise that new queer social movement organizations "not only differ from the equality-based framework of the GRM but also constitute their own Queer Liberation Movement (QLM)" (p. 65). He argued the "QLM offers a model of queer activism that is ultimately broader, more intersectional, and more justice-centred than the mainstream movement" (DeFilippis, 2018, p. 65).

Collective Identity and Identity Politics

The queer social movement has quintessentially been categorized as an identity-based movement (Adam, Duyvendak, & Krouwel, 1998; Armstrong, 2002; Bernstein, 1997, 2002; Bernstein & Taylor, 2013; Chesters & Welsh, 2011; Engel, 2001; J. Gamson, 1995; Rimmerman, 2002). Though collective identity has been challenged in the queer social movement, the movement has been successful due to constant progression toward the destabilizing of identities (J. Gamson, 1995). According to Diani and Bison (2004):

Collective identity is a process strongly associated with recognition and the creation of connectedness. It brings with it a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause, which enables single activists and organizations to regard themselves as inextricably linked to other actors, not necessarily identical but surely compatible, in a broader collective mobilization. (p. 284)

Melucci (1992) argued collected identity is "constructed and negotiated through activation of social relationships connecting the members of a group or movement [and implies] the presence of cognitive frames, of dense interactions, of emotional and affective exchanges" (p. 49). The queer social movement has exhibited a constructed and negotiated collective identity that has linked social actors and organizations. In fact, most initial social movement organizations that

once positioned themselves as gay and lesbian organizations now operate as queer organizations or use other nomenclature (e.g., “Pride” or the “Rainbow Community”) to be more inclusive of anyone who identifies as anything other than heterosexual. Given identity is fluid and the queer social movement consists of diverse and heterogeneous individuals, the construction of collective identity has become an endlessly evolving task of the movement (Buechler, 1993; Gerlach & Hine, 1970).

Identity politics seeks to understand the compounded relationship between experience, culture, identity, politics, and power (Bernstein, 2005). Bernstein (2002) indicated “identity politics refers to politics based on essentialist or fixed notions of identity” (p. 532). Bernstein (2005) noted that identity plays an important role in all social movements and queer identity politics is an attempt to bring a diverse group of people together (e.g., gays, lesbians, trans, two-spirit, bisexuals, queers) under one umbrella term to challenge the heterosexual–homosexual binary. Bernstein (1997) and Polletta and Jasper (2001) provided a discussion on the various reasons why social movement organizations may draw on an existing identity or create a new collective identity. Defenders of identity politics view it as a necessary strategy to obtain equality and to gain entry into mainstream society (Bernstein, 2002; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Stychin, 2005). Though fixed identity categories form the basis for political power, critics argue it is also the basis for oppression (Bernstein, 2002; J. Gamson, 1995; Stychin, 2005). For instance, J. Gamson (1995) argued the challenge of queer theory and queer activism lies primarily in its disruption and deconstruction of identity boundaries.

Taylor and Whittier (1992) provided a framework for analyzing the construction of collective identity in social movements. Specifically, they argued collective identity in social movement work is comprised of three interrelated factors: (a) the creation of social boundaries

which identify who is part of the group, (b) the creation of collected consciousness which recognizes a group's position in social structures, and (c) the negotiating of internal and external group meanings. Building on this framework, Egner (2019) indicated "consciousness is a continuous process imparted through discourse, in which groups reexamine themselves through their shared experiences, understandings, opportunities, and common interests" and "collective consciousness informs and is informed by collective identity" (p. 144).

Social Capital

Developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), the current prominence of the concept of social capital owes much to the work of Robert Putnam (N. Field, 2003; Jeannotte, 2003). Though social capital has a controversial and contested history (Fulkerson & Thompson, 2008; Portes, 2000), it is understood here as the "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Putnam (2000) made a distinction between "bonding social capital," (p. 23) which reinforces connections between exclusive identities, and "bridging social capital," (p. 23) which involves social networks between diverse heterogeneous groups (e.g., different social classes, race, or religion).

Part of the success of the queer movement is due to the social capital manifested through a networked approach that has enabled ties with other like-minded social movement activists, leaders, organizations, businesses, politicians, and other institutions (Chaffe, 2014). Social movement organizations with a greater stock of ties in their community are more likely to survive (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Further, organizations with more socially diverse memberships will have greater access to social networks, enabling them to develop broad social contact that facilitates greater networked access to resources (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004;

Gould, 1991; Knoke & Wisely, 1990). In highlighting the importance of movement networking, Diani and Bison (2004) indicated network boundaries of social movements are necessarily drawn and redrawn over time.

Social capital, however, is not something that can be easily acquired without the investment of material resources and possession of some cultural knowledge that would enable someone to develop relationships with others (Portes, 2000). In applying social capital as an attribute of a society itself, Putnam (as cited in Portes, 2000) made it possible to talk about the stock of social capital in society. In this regard, it is possible to view social capital as a flow at the individual level and a stock at a movement or organizational level. In the context of this study, this implies individuals creating queer theatre festivals may possess social connections and relations that benefit the organization and the explicit networks the organization itself has established (e.g., all queer theatre festivals in this study were connected to Pride organizations and other queer groups in their respective cities).

Cultural and Symbolic Capital

The idea of cultural capital was also given prominence by Bourdieu (as cited in Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Cultural capital is the cultural goods or resources one uses or attains to gain social standing and is paid out over time via relationships with others but is also accumulated and regenerated from social relationships (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized cultural capital existing in three forms: (a) embodied capital or habitus, which consists of long-lasting dispositions that form an individual's character and guide their actions and tastes; (b) objectified capital, in the form of cultural goods such as theatre performances or paintings; and (c) institutional capital, a form of objectification that establishes the value of the cultural capital presumed to uphold it. In an ethnographic study on lesbian experiences in lesbian bars, Rooke

(2007) introduced the concept of *lesbian habitus* to explore the visual and embodied practices in lesbian culture.

Several scholars have expanded on Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital and its forms. Throsby (2002) extended Bourdieu's concept of objectified capital to include both tangible and intangible cultural capital forms. According to Throsby, tangible cultural capital is "an asset that embodies a store of cultural value, separable from whatever economic value it might possess;" (p. 103) whereas, intangible cultural capital consists of "ideas, traditions, beliefs, and customs shared by a group of people," including intellectual capital that "exists as language, literature, music and so on" (p. 103). Drawing on the work of Yosso (2005), who explored cultural capital in communities of colour, Pennell (2016) explored the cultural capital possessed by queers. In addition to Yosso's forms of capital—aspirational (the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in the face of real and perceived structural inequalities), linguistic (the verbal and nonverbal forms of language), familial (the cultural knowledge nurtured through family that includes figurative chosen families, history, community memories, community connection, and resources), navigational (the ability to navigate through institutions not created with marginalized communities in mind), and resistance (the knowledge and skills nurtured through oppositional behaviour that challenge inequality)—Pennell argued queer communities also possess transgressive capital. According to Pennell, transgressive capital "indicates the ways in which communities (queer or other marginalized groups) proactively challenge and move beyond boundaries that limit and bind them, creating their own reality" (p. 329).

Cultural capital is less tangible and relatively unstable compared to other forms of capital. Further, it is only beneficial to the extent people recognize it as having symbolic value; that is, to the extent to which it has symbolic capital (Jackson & Hogg, 2010; Lawler, 2011). Symbolic

capital is another term coined by Bourdieu and it is often regarded as honour and prestige or “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Lawler, 2011, p. 2). Though Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is largely from the perspective of the individual, scholars have begun to conceptualize it in collective terms (Gould, 2001; Jeannotte, 2003). Through this conceptualization, a link from cultural capital to social capital exists (Jeannotte, 2003).

The success of the queer social movement and queer counterpublics stems from a focus on cultural development (Armstrong, 2002; Bruce, 2016; Shepard, 2010; M. Warner, 2002). Ilmonen and Juvonen (2015) claimed queer culture is always in a state of becoming. Thus, when focused on cultural production, the work of a social movement is never finished, as cultural creation is on ongoing phenomena that will ebb and flow to the changing demands of society and movement participants. Social movements have employed various cultural forms to advance their movement, and thus it is through “examining the social processes by which people do culture [that we] can deepen our understanding of how social movements operate” (W. G. Roy, 2010, p. 95).

Juris (2014) indicated “it is through cultural performance that alternative meanings, values, and identities are produced, embodied, and publicly communicated within social movements” (p. 227). Cultural performances help to bridge the mind–body divide in social movements and elicit emotions in people, which helps form collective identities and brings people together to create a sense of community (Juris, 2014). Swidler (1995) argued culture could have significant influence “if it shapes not individuals’ beliefs and aspirations, but their knowledge of how others will interpret their actions” (p. 39). In addition, culture can positively

impact a social movement even if individuals or groups in that movement are divided in their beliefs (Swidler, 1995).

Play as a Social Justice Instrument

Shepard's (2010) book, *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movements*, provided a series of case studies on the use of inventive arts-based community building tactics and activities (e.g., drag, dance, cultural jamming, street and performance art) used by activists in queer social movement organizations (e.g., ACT UP). The theoretical contribution of Shepard's work is that play can be used as a social movement resource. Shepard defined play as "a metaphor for a healthy form of creativity and exchange" (p. 22). They argued play serves as a creative form of activism and as an effective tool for group cohesion, community development, personal change, and as a tactic in shifting public perception. According to Shepard, "queers have always known pleasure is a resource. Play injects a high octane means with which to reimagine ways for people to connect, build public commons, and democratic vistas honouring notions of difference and possibility" (p. 21).

Other scholars have also illustrated the use of playful approaches in the queer social movement. Lundberg (2007) conducted an analysis of the performance aspect of the Stockholm Pride Parade and illustrated how humour and politics can work together as an effective political statement. They argued the comic element included in such performances serves to break down implicit norms concerning sexuality, race, and gender. Similarly, Browne (2008) examined the performances at Pride in Dublin and Brighton and focused on the overlap and tension between politics, pleasure, and performativities. They argued "Pride could be characterized as a party with politics" (Browne, 2008, p. 73). In discussing the playful tactics of pride parades, Johnston

(2005) argued they are emancipatory events that have “the potential to upset the ‘ordinary’ and ‘everyday’ notions of public spaces” (p. 106).

Exploring the political performance of a radical Israeli activist group in the Tel Aviv Pride parade, Ziv (2010) found that “performance is an effective political tool, owing both to its immediate dramatic and emotional impact, and to its ability to suspend automatic reaction patterns” (p. 546). They also argued it is necessary to expand the performance lens to ensure we do not only view a performance from the viewpoint of the observer, but also consider the impacts on the performers themselves and the backstage events that led to the performance. I discuss the functions of performance in more detail in the section “Performance Theory and Performativity.”

Social Movement Learning

[New social] movements are *objectively revolutionary*, but not inevitably revolutionary; *education plays the key role* here of making the movements subjectively revolutionary. In other words, the role of social movement learning in this context is *to make people critically conscious* of their own practice.

—Holst, 2018, p. 86, emphasis added

Though adult education has long been associated with social movements, social movements as sites of knowledge production—conceiving social movement actors as active agents in the construction of meaning and action—is a relatively new theoretical approach (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Holford, 1995). According to Finger (as cited in Hall & Turray, 2006), social movements have “a more powerful impact on society than does all of the learning that takes place in schools” (p. 8). As I previously mentioned, Holst (2018) shared a similar perspective on the importance of education in social movements. The traditional view of social

movement learning focused on the learning from large-scale protests that attempted to educate and persuade politicians and the public at large, learning that occurred informally through mentoring, or formal learning through worships, seminars, and lectures (Holst, 2002). However, new social movement theorists have argued social movement learning is a more authentic form of learning that centres on personal transformation rather than mass societal transformation (Holst, 2002). In comparing old and new social movements, Finger (1989) argued new social movements take up adult education first and foremost as a way to impact social, political, and cultural life.

Eyerman and Jamison (1991) viewed social movements as forms of “cognitive praxis” (p. 45)—the praxis being that the production of knowledge is constituted by both construction and practice shaped by internal and external political processes and their historical context. They conceive social movements “primarily as processes through which meaning is constructed. In addition to the instrumental and strategic actions which are a necessary part of social movement praxis, social movements . . . are producers of knowledge” (p. 94). Further, Eyerman and Jamison argued the production of knowledge is essential to the establishment of collective identities in social movements and it is through the process of identity formation all new knowledge originates. It is thus through the activities of “movement intellectuals” (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991, p. 99) that knowledge and collective identity is produced—a process Eyerman and Jamison call “social learning” (p. 55). Kilgore (1999) established the theory of collective learning to describe social movement learning. According to Kilgore, collective learning involves both individual and group components:

Individual components . . . are identity, consciousness, sense of agency, sense of worthiness and sense of connectedness. [It] answers the question ‘Who am I?’ . . . [and] is

not only one's perception of self as unique from other individuals and groups but also as interdependent with other individuals and groups. Components of collective development . . . include collective identity, group consciousness, solidarity[,] and organization. [It] answers the question, 'Who are we?' . . . [and] consists of learning components like taken-as-shared meanings that may lead the group to a course of collective action. (pp. 196–197)

Social movement learning occurs typically in informal or incidental ways by people both inside and outside of the social movement (Foley, 1999; Hall & Clover, 2005). Learning by those outside of the movement occurs because of direct actions taken by social movement participants and simply because of the existence of the movement itself (Hall & Clover, 2005). Hall and Clover indicated the most powerful form of social movement learning is learning that occurs by people not directly participating as a member of a social movement. They also contend “the power of social movements” (p. 585) is in their ability to “reframe the world,” (p. 585) to which they call “this transformation of vision and imagination” (p. 585) learning.

In addition to initial learning, however, it is sometimes necessary to unlearn, relearn, or remember (critical social and self-reflection). Critical reflection of self and the social, which in turn can lead to learning or relearning, is often a catalyst for dialogue and consciousness raising (Vieyra, 2015). Foley (1999) argued “the unlearning of dominant, oppressive ideologies and discourses and the learning of oppositional, liberatory ones are central to processes of emancipatory action” (p. 4). Foley went on to state, “adult education is a complex social and value-creating activity, one which is shaped by, and which shapes, social structure and culture, and which inevitably involves ethical judgments and choices” (p 3).

The learning that occurs in social movements facilitates shared meaning and a greater collective identity, both critical for the mobilization of people (Hall, Clover, Crowther, & Scandrett, 2011; Kilgore, 1999). The social action of a social movement thus has the ability to produce new knowledge including worldviews, ideologies, and theories (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991). The learning that occurs as a result of a collective identity and the action, negotiation, and the challenges to dominant societal structures is collective/social (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Kilgore, 1999), emancipatory (Welton, 1993; Seçkin, 2016), embodied (Drew, 2014; Ollis, 2008) and transformative (Čubajevaitė, 2015; Finger, 1989; Freire, 1970; Holst, 2002).

Transformative learning is a useful theory for understanding learning in social movements. Developed by Mezirow (2000), “transformative learning is at the heart of significant adult learning and [is] central to adult education” (p. xv). Influenced by Freire’s (1970) concept of conscientization,¹² Mezirow’s concept of transformative learning

refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 7–8)

The first stage of the transformative learning process is a disorienting dilemma such as a dramatic personal event or life crisis (Mezirow, 1991a). The disorienting dilemma acts as a trigger for critical reflection leading to perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991a; Raikou, 2018; Y. Taylor, 2009).

¹² Conscientization refers to “the process in which ~~men~~ [individuals], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 51, emphasis added).

How social movements use art has been undertheorized in the literature (Adams, 2002). However, some scholars in addition to Shepard (2010) have discussed the role of the arts in social movement learning. The arts—photography, theatre, poetry, painting, quilt-making—have been successfully employed in social movements as enablers of “new understandings, containers for dialogue, and mediums to generate new knowledge” by artists who serve as “mediators and agents of critical social learning and change” (Clover, 2012, p. 87). Though not specifically focused on social movements, Butterwick and Roy (2018) have explored how the arts contribute to adult learning and social justice. They argued “artistic and creative expression, thoughtfully carried out, can enliven adult learning, promote risk taking and empathy for others, and move toward relations of solidarity” (Butterwick & Roy, 2018, p. 3). They also concluded creative expression helps to “develop moral humility by tapping into the emotional dimension . . . central to building relations of solidarity” (Butterwick & Roy, 2018, p. 3) and learning. Eyerman (2014) and Adams (2002) have also explored how the arts in social movements communicate movement ideas and knowledge.

Social Movement Leadership and Activism

Though leadership in social movements has been undertheorized and narrowly conceptualized, it provided a lens for my study (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001; Herda-Rapp, 1998; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). Morris and Staggenborg (2004) explained the lack of discourse is because leadership in social movements has yet to be adequately defined due to a “failure to fully integrate agency and structure in theories of social movements” (p. 171). The literature that does exist on social movement leadership focuses primarily on visible formal leadership positions in social movement organizations (Couto, 1993; Eichler, 1977; Gusfield, 1966; Herda-Rapp, 1998; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). For example, Morris and Staggenborg

defined social movement leaders as “strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others to participant in social movements” (p. 171). Weber’s concept of charismatic leadership— leadership whereby people respect the special or symbolic qualities of an individual and allow the leader to act on their behalf by virtue of such qualities—has heavily influenced the thinking of sociologists about leadership in social movements (Eichler, 1977; Gusfield, 1966; Morgan, 2006).

Like Eichler (1977), Herda-Rapp (1998), Barker, Johnson, and Lavalette (2001), and Gardner (2011), I believe it is necessary to distinguish between informal (associated or unassociated with an organization) and formal leaders. The very notion of leadership has been rejected by some activists due to the conceptualization of leadership with the “*monopolisation [sic] of decision-making* in groups, or with *domination* over a group” (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001, p. 2, emphasis in original). To correct for the “lopsided conceptualization of leadership,” Herda-Rapp argued the focus on visible leadership in formal organizations of the civil rights movement has overshadowed the importance of “informal, extra-organizational and autonomous movement [leadership]” (p. 341) by Black women. In discussing informal leadership outside an organization, Herda-Rapp indicated being a motivational leader involves having an optimistic attitude, using narratives, and leading by example. Couto (1993) also indicated the importance of narratives shared in free spaces. According to Couto, narratives “transmit and continue a belief in the virtue of the oppressed” (p. 60) and they “may support social movements because they assert a social life or at least better understanding of a group’s social condition than that which prevails in the dominant culture” (p. 61). Further, drawing largely on the women’s liberation movement, Eichler distinguished between the source of legitimacy of a leader as either open or closed. In a closed-access movement, legitimacy is

monopolized by a single charismatic individual (i.e., a closed-access leader). Thus, closed-access leaders (e.g., Hitler) have total control over followers and the followers are personally committed to the leader. On the other hand, followers of an open access movement (e.g., women's liberation movement and the queer social movement) are committed to an ideology or principle. As a result, leadership for Eichler in an open-access movement is open and accessible to anyone and there is no single leader.

Gardner (2011) defined a leader as someone “*who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings*” and whose “voices affected their worlds, and, ultimately, our world” (p. 8, emphasis in original). In discussing their theoretical concept of leadership, Gardner distinguished between two types of leaders: direct and indirect. The traditional view of leadership is direct leadership, which includes those who have formal positions and are responsible for leading others (e.g., presidents, CEOs, committee chairs). Indirect leaders, on the other hand, lead by example in their field through the work they create (e.g., artists or scientists) and they may never become direct leaders. Central to Gardner's (2011) theory is the story that the leader “relates or embodies, and the receptions to that story on the part of audiences (or collaborators or followers)” (p. 13). Gardner uses the term *relate* rather than *tell* because there are many ways to communicate other than through words (e.g., through visuals). For instance, leaders in the arts communicate their stories through their chosen media of artistic expression, and in addition to communicating these stories through spoken words, they also embody them. Clover and Stalker (2007) have also taken up leadership through the arts and discussed how the arts are used to communicate and tell stories. They defined cultural leadership “as using an arts medium to

develop an aesthetic, cultural voice, sense of identity and consciousness and actor or agent of change in community or society” (p. 14).

The leader who attempts to tell a successful story or narrative must compete with the many stories that individuals have already heard. As Gardner (2011) explained,

the stories of the leader—be they traditional or novel—must compete with many other extant stories; and if the new stories are to succeed, they must transplant, suppress, complement, or in some measure outweigh the earlier stories, as well as contemporary oppositional “counterstories.” (p. 13)

In reviewing Gardiner’s theory of leadership, Bennis (1996) noted “effective leaders put words to the formless longings and deeply felt needs of others. They create communities out of words” (para. 26).

Though there is a link between activism and leadership in social movements, they are not the same. Activism is generally understood as a process whereby individuals or groups of people act intentionally to exert pressure on societal institutions or organizations to challenge existing hegemonies and provoke political or social changes to policies, practices, or conditions they deem problematic (Brough & Shresthova, 2012; Smith, 2005). In discussing queer activism, Offord (2001) noted activists are individuals

who organizes in order to influence state and civil society through action that may include education (for example, by the production of leaflets), compromise, persuasion tactics, or force (for example, by the use of demonstrations and protests). The activist voice is one that argues for change, strategises [*sic*] approaches to change, documents action and relevant information, lobbies political parties, pressures individuals and

communities, and complains through, for example, theatrical events, cultural forms, or through analysis and critique. (p. 156)

Activism in this study is understood according to Offord's definition.

Activists and activist organizations thus operate in the conflict between what they believe should be and what is (Heath & Waymer, 2009). To bring about change, activists and activist organizations build sources of legitimacy, power, and urgency through attracting funding, followers, and public support to increase their chances for success (Smith & Ferguson, 2010). The way activists and activist organizations do activism takes on various forms. Forms of activism can include confrontational approaches such as protests and illegal and radical stunts; consensus-driven and cooperative forms using dialogic methods; creative forms such as theatre, poems, and performances; and other forms such as letter and email writing campaigns and interviews (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012; Hodgson & Brooks, 2007; Land, 2009).

According to Ollis (2008, 2011), activists can either be classified as lifelong or circumstantial. Lifelong activists have a history of activism usually through being involved in student politics or through being socialized by their parents' political action (Ollis, 2011). Circumstantial activists, on the other hand, become involved in protest after a series of life events that has driven them to act (Ollis, 2011). These later activists tend to have less formal training in activism and do not necessarily identify as activists (Ollis, 2011).

Activists generally share five common traits: first, they recognize something problematic; second, they feel empowered to act; third, they seek information; fourth, they communicate with others and the institutions they deem responsible for the problem; and finally, they generally organize themselves to address the problem (Smith, 2005). Just like leadership and education, activism and education are unavoidably intertwined (Schindel, 2008). Not only are activists

educating themselves on the policies, practices, or conditions they deem problematic and the process of enacting change, but they are also educating the rest of society by acting.

Queer Festivals: Events and Festival Studies

Cultural festivals have become increasingly popular in Canada, and local, provincial, and federal governments and other organizations invest heavily in such events. Extensive scholarship exists on Pride festivals (e.g., Browne, 2008; Bruce, 2016; Drissel, 2017; Eleftheriadis, 2015; Johnston, 2005, 2007; Markwell & Waitt, 2009; J. Taylor, 2014b) and queer film and video festivals (e.g., Anderson, 2012; Binnie & Klesse, 2018; Paramaditha, 2018; Stanciu, 2014; Stuart, 2016; G. Turner, 2006; Waugh & Straayer, 2007). However, there appears to exist no extensive study conducted on queer theatre festivals. One article I was able to locate was Merriman's (2009) article of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. Merriman, who created the festival in 2004, outlined the political, artistic, and social goals of what they sought to achieve through the festival (Merriman, 2009). The overarching goal in creating the festival was to contribute to the liberation of gay people by entertaining and helping "people realize that difference enriches and fulfils the arts and a democratic society" (Merriman, 2009, p. 100). However, this article was from Merriman's perspective and did not include interviews with artists or audience members to understand the extent to which festival goals were achieved. Other studies of queer festivals, however, provided an important lens for this study.

Drissel's (2017) study on Belfast Pride in Northern Ireland found the festival contributed to queer cultural development and a collective identity. They argued the queering of public spaces establishes a counterpublic:

In the counterhegemonic-spatial practices of Belfast Pride, irreverent humor [*sic*], melodramatic camp, and delirious drag have become the new weapons of the weak;

thereby successfully empowering the sexually oppressed as they commemorate their collective memories of the past, while promoting their shared hopes for the future.

(Drissel, 2017, p. 259)

In their study on a queer youth festival, J. Taylor (2014a) postulated such festivals were “ritualized practices” (p. 9) that provided exposure to multiple queer communities. As a result, the festival was beneficial in terms of helping the youth establish their own cultural practices and in providing them with opportunities for identity and sexual self-making. Similarly, Eleftheriadis’s (2015) study on a queer do-it-yourself (DIY) festival in Berlin found the festival acted as a prefigurative space that helped establish a queer collective identity. Eleftheriadis stated: “Through the repetition of specific practices, participants and organizers reinforce the feeling of belonging to a community. The festival becomes therefore an arena which gives meaning to what it is to be ‘queer’” (p. 664).

Johnston (2007) studied the relationship between pride, shame, performativity, gender, sexuality, and politics of resistance at the Pride Scotland festival. In discussing the findings, Johnston stated “rather than merely turning inward as a response to shame, queer women drummers draw on camp sensibilities in order to challenge heteronormative understandings of bodies and space” (p. 42). In an extensive study on four Pride festivals in Australia, Markwell and Waitt (2009) sought to understand the role spatiality had on the process of social change in regard to sexuality. They argued “festivals celebrating sexuality resonate differently not only between cities, but also within social groups, changing economic ideologies and addressing a range of issues, such as the rise of HIV/AIDS, same-sex marriage and lesbian and gay men parenting” (p. 144).

The political and economic landscape in which the queer movement arose and in which Pride festivals exist have shaped the movement and the festivals (Chasin, 2000). Several researchers have discussed how neoliberalism has been a driving force for commodifying queer and alluded to a pink dollar¹³ that entices marketers and organizations to target the queer community (Chasin, 2000; Douglas, 2007; Minogue, 2003; Ward, 2003; Ward 2008). Though many scholars and activists are critical of this, Kates and Belk (2001) argued the highly commercialized and excess of Pride festivals contributes significantly to the promotion of diversity and a sense of queer community.

Extensive research has been conducted on queer film festivals (for a detailed summary of film festival research see Loist & de Valck, 2017). Queer film festivals have been conceptualized as counterpublic spaces engaged in an ongoing process of identity formation (Binnie & Klesse, 2018; J. Gamson, 1996; Heath, 2018; White, Rich, O'Clarke, & Funk, 1999). Rich (2013), who has written extensively on queer cinema, contended queer film festivals provide a space for queers outside the mainstream. Queer film festivals, Rich stated,

offer a space where diverse queer publics can come and frame their attendance as a community. This shared communion . . . reinforces the fail of the faithful, assures supplicants of their worthiness, creates a bond to carry individually into the larger world, and puts audiences back in touch with shared experiences and values. (p. 37)

Despite the positive impacts of queer film festivals, Rich (2013) found they can create a prescriptive and exclusionary version of community. This occurs, Rich argued, because “audiences don’t want disruption or “difference,” (p. 37) rather, there is a “hunger for sameness, replication, reflection . . . to feel good” (p. 37). Festival organizers focused on such desires by

¹³ The pink dollar is commonly used to describe the purchasing power of the queer community.

audience members can result in homonormative programming, which has occurred at some film festivals (Richards, 2016). However, some film festivals have consciously and actively worked to avoid this (Heath, 2018).

In a conference dossier about lesbian and gay film festivals published in the journal *GLQ*, White, Rich, O'Clarke, and Fung (1999) discussed the cultural work of lesbian and gay film festivals. White noted queer film festivals are sites "providing a collective experience and a literal site of critical reception" (White, Rich, O'Clarke, & Fung, 1999, p. 74), but there exists a split between lesbian and gay representation and spectatorship depending on the location of the event. In discussing the Toronto Inside Out Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival (now known as simply Inside Out), Fung argued the festival is one of the few sites where different queers and communities intersect and interact in the postgay liberation era that has resulted in a fragmentation of community. Fung also observed such festivals "constitute a kind of double representation on and in front of the screen" (White, Rich, O'Clarke, & Fung, 1999, p. 90) in that when someone programs such a festival, they are also programming the audience and the community.

Binnie and Klesse (2018) found the GAZE International Film Festival in Dublin fosters the production of a queer community, provides a space for the reproduction of a queer collective memory, and provides a platform to further the rights of LGBT people. Further, they noted the festival forms part of a queer transnational public sphere that provides a space for intergenerational solidarity and "for the intergenerational transmission, reproduction and restaging of oral history" (Binnie & Klesse, 2018, p. 204). In a study on a queer film and video festival in Seoul, Kim and Hung (2007) also found the festival provided a platform for discourse that can help further the rights of queers. Specifically, they indicated such festivals provide a

space for public discourse on sexuality and gender that can reveal dissonances and differences that exist at the intersection of gender, class, and sexuality. Through actively disclosing and discussing power relations that exists between gender, class, and sexuality, the authors argued language can be created for queers so they can intervene in the power relations that exists.

In discussing the history and impacts of the Inside Out Film Festival in Toronto, Andersen (2012) noted the festival is seen as a community resource that provides a tool for education, community building, and a celebration of the queer community in Toronto; however, the study lacked specificity around what was learned and how learning occurred. C. Roy (2016), an adult educator in Canada, discussed the learning that occurred at three documentary film festivals in Canada. While not queer festivals, the festivals have incorporated gay and lesbian movie themes. C. Roy indicated these festivals build community, foster critical thinking, and connect with people's experiences. According to C. Roy, the festivals are sites of transformative learning.

Theatrology and Politics: Social Justice Theatre and Related Performance Research

I perform these stories of who I have been in order to imagine who I might become. It is a fierce act of imagining the future.

It is my own flag that unfurls. . . .

Our narratives throw down an enormous challenge for our country to drag itself kicking and screaming into a new era and to finally create a space for all **our voices**.”

(Miller, 2006, p. 102, emphasis added).

There are moments where a performance event comes together and the audience feels **united** as a public and is able to imagine together a space in which the world can be just a little **more just**.

These moments are *magical*.”

(Snyder-Young, 2013, p. 138, emphasis added).

Social justice theatre (SJT) is an umbrella term for a wide range of theatre that addresses social justice issues, including activist theatre, agitprop, community cultural development, theatre for development, devised theatre, grassroots theatre, political theatre, and Theatre of the Oppressed (Bowles, 2013). Much of the literature is focused on applied or participatory theatre, which is not the type of theatre typically shown at the queer theatre festivals in this study. Nevertheless, this discussion is relevant for understanding if queer theatre festivals can be understood as social justice theatre events.

Prentki and Preston (2009) provided a simple definition of SJT: It is “theatre in the service of social change” (p. 12). The major aims of SJT include (a) educating participants on social justice issues, (b) sharing histories and calling out oppression, (c) building community and shaping culture, (d) raising critical consciousness, (e) managing anger and healing sociopsychological wounds, (f) shattering silence and providing a voice to marginalized members of the community, (g) changing attitudes, (h) encouraging and motivating people to take action, and (i) transforming individuals and communities to interrupt or change oppressive structures and behaviours (Bell & Desai, 2011; Boal, 1995; Bowles, 2013; Hanley, 2011; Thompson & Schechner, 2004). Through telling their personal stories of oppression, performers not only communicate information about issues or ideas, but also they make sense of their lives, and so too does the audience (Snyder-Young, 2011; Thompson, 2009).

For Thompson and Schechner (2004), SJT is not limited to performances in nontheatrical places and they argued effective social theatre “rub[s] up against” (p. 13) the everyday. It is theatre that “operates on the cutting edge between [the] performing arts and sociocultural intervention” (Erven, 2001, p. 1). According to Haedicke (1998), SJT “is an activist form of dramaturgy which aims to influence and alter the actual world, not just reflect it,” (p. 132) and

that “[it] provides an avenue to individual empowerment and community development as it moves the audience into a new role: an artist, a maker of culture who can create a new community” (p. 132). According to Booth (2014),

drama has become our principal means of expressing and interpreting the world as we explore and communicate ideas and information, social behaviours, values, feelings, and attitudes, with mass audiences greater than anyone had ever contemplated. We are entertained, informed, angered, persuaded, manipulated, touched, both consciously and subliminally, by the thousands of performances we experience, and sometimes we are changed because of their influenced and their impact on our lives. (p. 18)

Sky Gilbert (as cited in Gilbert & Giles, 2014), one of the founders of Buddies in Bad Times, shared a similar sentiment about theatre:

I’ve always tried to encourage the idea that theatres are modern churches. Of course[,] I have a huge distrust of conventional, homophobic religion, but I think that people need places to worship—to feel inspired and divine. . . . I want to go to the theatre and laugh, but also be touched by the depths of anger and sadness. (p. 182)

Etmanski (2007) discussed the usage of popular theatre by a nonprofit theatre company in Vancouver. They stated theatre “is innately political in its capacity to maintain the status quo or to transform our perceptions of reality” (Etmanski, 2007, p. 105). The performances not only stimulated dialogue and raised awareness around local issues, but also provided participants with valuable work and training experience. Similarly, Butterwick and Selman (2012) discussed how theatre can be embodied pedagogy that can provide opportunities for transformation. Relying on the gendered performance of theatre, they argued theatre “provides avenues for decolonizing oppressive gender politics and deepening understandings of gender as a performance”

(Butterwick & Selman, 2012, p. 62). Though theatre “can reveal meaningful stories that create opportunities for building community and commonalities, reflection, analysis, and strategizing for action . . . [it] can [also] trigger unremembered and unprocessed stories and memories” (Butterwick & Selman, 2012, p. 62) that can be overwhelming and dangerous for people. Yet for Lawrence and Butterwick (2007) “theatre is a powerful way to tell stories of oppression, to honour the specificity of those experiences, and engage with an analysis of them to determine actions that can move us in the direction of achieving social justice” (p. 415).

Queer Theory and a Queer Politic

Queer theory is a relatively new concept, which dates back to the 1990s (Allen, 2015). Though often thought of as an invention of modern-day society, queer theory has a distinct evolutionary history in the lines of homosexuality and gay and lesbian studies (Bredbeck, 2000; Zimmerman & Haggerty, 2000; Whittle, 1996). According to Zimmerman and Haggerty (2000), the roots of queer theory commenced with the study of homosexuality that began in 1869. Despite the wide suppression of gays and lesbians that drove homosexuals underground, Kinsey, with his seminal sexology studies in the 1940s, and Foster, with her lesbians in literature study in the 1950s, became “heroic role models” (Zimmerman & Haggerty, 2000, p. xi) for scholarly research related to homosexuality. The study of homosexuality marked a shift in focus from behaviour to identity that established the foundation for identity politics (Zimmerman & Haggerty, 2000). Without “a prior identity politics to deconstruct . . . queer theory is unlikely to have emerged” (Allen, 2015, p. 681).

According to Halperin (2003) and Johnston (2005), queer theory emerged as a joke from Teresa de Lauretis, who used the phrase for a title of a conference they held at the University of California in February of 1990. Butler’s (1990) book *Gender Trouble: Feminist and the*

Subversion of Identity and Sedgwick's (1990) book *Epistemology of the Closet* are considered two of the founding texts in queer theory (Bredbeck, 2000; Grace, 2008; Halperin, 1995, 2003; Jagose, 1996; M. Warner, 2008). Other scholars, like Jagose (1996), Halperin (1995), and Halberstam (1998), have also been instrumental in the establishment and advancement of queer theory. Building on the work of Foucault, who argued we must liberate ourselves from the binary norms that constitute homo–hetero sexuality (Halperin, 1995), Butler's (1990) theory of performativity argued heterosexuality and gender is an imitation produced and performed by society. Due to its prominence and importance in this study, performativity will be discussed in its own section later in this act.

Despite its academic relevance, queer theory is rooted in social activists and organizations, such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, Body Politic, AIDS Action Now, and Pink Triangle, that sought to challenge heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia (Grace, 2008; Sullivan, 2003). Queer theory, thus, focuses on those excluded by the heteronormative and relates to sexualities that are anything but heterosexual (Jagose, 2005). According to Given (2008), “queer theory contests, interrogates, and disrupts the systematic and structural relationships of power that are historically caught up in heteronormative attitudes, values, and practices as well as heteronormative ideological, linguistic, existential, and strategic conventions and constructs” (p. 719). In addition, it resists the limited categories brought about by heteronormativity and “assumes a spectrum of fluid sex, sexual, and gender differences that are always in a state of becoming; being is never fixed and belonging is never a certainty” (Grace, 2008, p. 720).

In stating the aim of queer theory, Seidman (1994) articulated it involved disrupting “hetero-and-homosexual identities, revealing the ways they are disciplinary and normalizing

with the hope of creating physical and social spaces that are hospitable to multiple, heterogeneous ways of figuring bodies, desires, social relations, and forms of collective life and politics” (p. 175). According to Hall (2003), queer theory attempts to bring sexuality—what is often considered a private matter confined to the bedrooms of individuals—to the forefront of social life. Jagose (2005) indicated “queer theory offers a postmodern critique of meta-narratives of identity, a critique of universal homogenous and fixed identity gender/sexuality categories, which are deemed essentialist” (p. 162).

Queer theory is useful as a critical theoretical lens in this study for several reasons. First, it is useful for acknowledging the multiplicity of participants and in understanding that their experiences are “fluid, unstable, and perpetually becoming” (Browne & Nash, 2016, p. 1). Second, queer theory allows for an understanding and juxtaposition of queer lives and experiences with those considered to be “normal” (Dilley, 1999). Through this understanding and juxtaposition, queer theory provides a framework for identifying whether heteronormative discourse is being deconstructed or reproduced (i.e., homonormativity) at queer theatre festivals. Duggan’s (2003) concept of new homonormativity is useful in this context. According to Duggan, the new homonormativity “is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 50). The third benefit is that queer theory is useful for taking up subjugated and embodied knowledge:

Queer theory shakes and unsettles sedimented knowledge. . . . It explores how bodies and ideas are constituted and often constrained. The slippages of sensibility often highlighted through the use of queer conceptual tools foregrounds the rigidity of many social

attitudes and practices, thus begging the question of why such tight boundaries are put into place. It also examines the porousness, recrafting and deterritorialization of the rules governing social convention and knowledge. These slippages, fissures, breaks and cracks are highlighted because they cast a spotlight onto the possibility of doing life differently and this is extremely political. (Gowlett & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 333)

Fourth, queer theory is useful for understanding the political nature of the festivals. According to Ruffalo (2006), “the use of queer theory as a critical research lens can resist normalization and reject assimilationist politics in order to bring about an equitable and democratic society where binary discourses are reworked” (p. 4). Gowlett and Rasmussen (2014) argued “the political in queer theory comes from throwing light into seemingly neutral practices and creating a discomfort about them” (p. 334). This political nature could show itself in a number of ways, like the queering of festival formats or the queering of people’s bodies and behaviours at the festivals. According to Whittle (1996),

queer theory is about the deconstruction and the refusal of labels of personal sexual activity, and it is also concerned with the removal of pathologies of sexuality and gendered behaviour. It concerns ‘gender fuck,’ which is a full-frontal theoretical and practical attack on the dimorphism of gender and sex-roles. (p. 202)

Lastly, queer theory is useful from a technical perspective as it calls for the challenging and disrupting of the status quo in academic research. For example, it calls for more informal and casual language; a mixing of multiple methodologies, methods, and theoretical and analytical lenses; and a disruption to conventional modes of data representation (Browne & Nash, 2016).

Intersectionality

The term *intersectionality* was coined by Crenshaw (1989) in their seminal publication, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine*. Intersectionality demands one look at the intersection of identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, health status (e.g., HIV positive), gender identity, ability, socioeconomic status, religion) to ensure we do not overlook the realities and challenges faced by people who belong to multiple marginalized groups as we work toward achieving a more equal and just society. As Crenshaw (2015) explained, “intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power . . . [and] the better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture” (para. 5–7).

McCall (2005) identified three approaches to studying intersectionality: anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical. The anticategorical approach refutes categories, as their use may contribute to the perpetuation or the production of inequalities in the process of producing differences (McCall, 2005). The intracategorical approach to studying intersectionality begins initially with the use of traditional categories (also referred to as a unified intersectional core that could be a single social group, culture, event, or concept) and then reveals the range of diversity in this category. On the other hand, the intercategorical approach begins with an anchor category (e.g., gender) and then expands the dimension of the analysis to other defined categories (e.g., class). For example, the incorporation of both gender (assume men and women for simplicity) and class (assume working, middle, and upper for simplicity) into a study would require an analysis of six groups (i.e., working class women and men, middle class women and men, and upper class women and men). The use of intersectionality in this study

aligns with McCall's intercategorical approach. Specifically, the queer community at the queer theatre festival sites is used as the single social group (i.e., queer as the anchor category) and then "the range of diversity and difference *within* the group" (McCall, 2005, p. 1782, emphasis in original) is incorporated.

Rosenblum (1994) claimed "queer identity is intersectional since most queers face multiple aspects of discrimination, as women, as people of color [*sic*], as poor people, as cross-gendered people, and as sexual subversives" (p. 89). As a result, "the discrimination that queers face is thus greater than anti-lesbian and anti-gay discrimination" (Rosenblum, 1994, p. 89). Intersectionality as a theory transcends various disciplines and has been discussed at great lengths in the literature in relation to queer identity (e.g., Bowleg, 2008; Brennan et al., 2013; Daley, Solomon, Newman, & Mishna, 2008; Dawson & Loist, 2018; DeFilippis, 2018; Douglas, Jivraj, & Lambie, 2011; J. Field, 2016; Fish, 2008; Fotopoulou, 2012; Kumashiro, 1999; Meyer, 2012; Rosenblum, 1994; Wehbi, 2004). Fotopoulou (2012) argued that linking queer theory and intersectionality is useful as a theoretical framework for thinking beyond issues of just sexuality and gender. For instance, J. Field (2016) and Dawson and Loist (2018) have argued class and socioeconomic status have not received adequate attention.

Intersectionality as a framework "has not been mainstreamed in social movement scholarship" (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016, p. 2). There are several reasons for incorporating intersectionality in this study. DeFilippis (2018) highlighted a major benefit of intersectionality when he stated, "an intersectional analysis . . . makes clear that homophobia alone is an incomplete explanation for the multiple marginalizations experienced by queer POC [people of colour], poor queer people, queer people who are immigrants or incarcerated, trans people, and more" (p. 67). Incorporating intersectionality with queer theory provides a holistic framework to

consider the multiply identities of queers to sufficiently and accurately account for the lived experiences of participants and how this may impact their perception, behaviour, and understanding as festivalgoers. Intersectionality as a lens was not only important for meaning making, but also practically in terms of interviewing people. Specifically, it helped me approach the interview without placing people into preconceived categories and made me aware of possible sensitivities that arose during the interview, such as the complexities of a queer identity with different religious or cultural backgrounds. As a result of incorporating intersectionality in this study, I approached each interview with a greater ethics of care for my participants.

Intersectionality was also useful for analyzing festival spaces and programming. Particularly, as I observed and participated in the festivals, I asked myself the following questions: Are there certain groups who dominate the space and who have more power in it? Is there representation from various intersections of the queer community? Do the themes of the performances privilege one group of queers or are they intersectional? Finally, the theory was also beneficial in terms of analyzing the work of the organizations to determine if they were operating from an intersectional perspective. This was important for understanding the impact these festivals have on the overall queer social movement. In other words, were these festivals and the corresponding organizations privileging White affluent males and lesbians or were they tackling intersectional, multi-issues of the broader queer community?

Performance Theory and Performativity

Performance and performativity are intrinsically linked through repetitive acts (Denzin, 2016). Though related, they should not be understood as the same. Schechner (1989) has traced performance as an analytical lens back to the mid-1950s. By conceptualizing a sociological framework of theatrical performances to analyze both actors on stage and the audience's reaction

to what they witness, Goffman (1959) used drama performances as a metaphor to examine symbolism and meaning of everyday human interactions in a broader social context. Goffman distinguished between three types of regions for performances: (a) front region (frontstage), (b) back region (backstage), and (c) outside. As the terms imply, frontstage actions are visible to the audience and are part of the performance, whereas backstage performances occur when there is no audience present (Goffman, 1959). Goffman identified the outside region to include all those performances that occur in other places besides the front and back regions. Individuals who are on the outside, “outsiders,” can impact an ongoing performance. With the aim of theorizing about gender performance, Goffman (1979) expanded on his performance framework by developing a theory he called “gender display” (p.1). Gendered behaviour of masculinity and femininity act as “scripts that are dictated by our environment that we consciously and unconsciously learn and perform in order to play our appropriate roles in society” (Wallis, 2011, p. 161).

Goffman’s performance theory was influential in ushering in the concept of the “performative turn” further progressed by Schechner and Turner (as cited in O’Connor & Anderson, 2015). The notion of the performative turn “democratize[s] the way we . . . understand and apply performance within social context” (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015, pp. 27–28). Bringing theatre and anthropology together, Schechner and Turner have used performance as an analytical lens to understand the performative nature of all aspects of society and to examine how events, rituals, and daily life are governed by a code of performance. Schechner (1977) argued performance “is a very inclusive notion of action” (p. 1) and includes any behaviour “restored” (Schechner, 2013, p. 28) or “twice-behaved” (Schechner, 2013, p. 28). They believed performance was a transformative site whereby something is created, changed, celebrated, or

completed (Schechner, 2013). Performance is construed as a broad range of human actions or events “framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displaced” (Schechner, 2013, p. 2) and is the result of learning and transmission from past performances that preceded the current one (i.e., all performances have a history). Schechner (2013) made the argument that performance can support the rigid structures of society or resist them, and that performances serve to entertain, create beauty, bring about change, build community, heal, educate, and ritualize.

V. Turner (1969, 1986, 1992), Fischer-Lichte (2008), Conquergood (1995, 2013), and Denzin (2003b) have all used performance theory to understand rituals and culture. In their research using performance as a lens to understand cultural rituals, V. Turner (1969) introduced the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*. Liminality is “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (V. Turner, 1969, p. 95). *Communitas* is “a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences with one’s fellows” (E. Turner, 2012, p. 2) and may occur spontaneously, normatively, or ideologically: “With *communitas*, a special camaraderie is developed between individuals who share the liminal state and develop a community of the in-between” (Bartlett, 2017, p. 28). Though *communitas* is of the now, it “extends into the future through language, law, and custom” (V. Turner, 1969, p. 113).

Rituals are performances with transformative power, as they bring about permanent change that is restorative in the sense that they recall, retrieve, and re-enact living behaviour (Brady, 1999). When extending the term performance to include rituals (e.g., drag performances and cabarets, both significant aspects of queer culture), performance can be understood as highlighting

a distinction between social memory and history as different forms of cultural transmission across time: Memory requires collective participation, whether at theatrical events, shamanic rituals, or Olympic opening ceremonies; history entails the critical . . . interpretation of written records. (Roach, 1995, p. 47)

Turner's (1969) concept of liminality has been extensively applied to festivals (e.g., Bennett, Taylor, & Woodward, 2014; Lucas & Wright, 2013; Pielichaty, 2015; Shields, 1990).

Through a lens of queer performance, I believe we can better incorporate all marginalized subjects—those who are anything but heterosexual—and better understand and articulate queer actions and the dichotomy between queer life in public and private domains. A performance lens is useful as the performance by someone is often caught up in the performance/presence of others (e.g., the audience), the environment/space, and societal structures—all of which have rippling effects on an individual's behaviour. For instance, one may perform their queerness differently at a queer theatre festival than in front of work colleagues. Performance in Goffman's (1959) sense is useful for capturing this understanding. From Goffman's viewpoint, it can be argued the everyday interactions in the frontstage and backstage by queers is contested by social structures that have established the proverbial closet, for which Sedgwick (1993a) argued is a “defining structure for gay oppression” (p. 71) and is a policing of sex in the bedroom. While “closeted-ness is a performance itself initiated as such by the speech act of a silence” (Sedgwick, 1993a, p. 3), so too is being out, and there exists “a multiplicity of scripts available to be performed and even more to be written” and rewritten (Gutterman, 1994, p. 232).

Schechner (1977, 2013) and V. Turner's (1969, 1982) view of rituals and cultural as performance is also useful for understanding the multiple meanings embedded in performances. Performances have the potential to not only bring about individual transformation, but also

changes to greater queer culture. Such a view of performance is useful for analyzing queer theatre festivals, which are interested in political change and represent sites of activism. If we view festivals as rituals of “collective performances” (Dayan, 2000, p. 44), then using a performance lens is also useful as it recognizes festivals are not autonomous entities operating only to their own rules.

Denzin (2003) argued that “performativity and performance exist in tension with one another, in a tension between *doing*, or performing, and the *done*, the text, the performance” (p. 10, emphasis in original). The theory of performativity is attributed to the work of Austin who coined the concept “performative utterance” (Sommerfeldt, Caine, & Molzahn, 2014). Following its conception, the theory has been evolved over time by several scholars, including Searle (1969), Derrida (1988), Butler (1988, 1990, 1993), and Sedgwick (2009). Current understandings and usage of performativity is largely aligned with the work of Butler. With a focus on gender, Butler (1990) postulated “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). Categories of identity are thus culturally and socially produced and are more likely to be a result of political cooperation than its condition of possibility (Culler, 2000). In other words, it is not what one is (e.g., woman, trans, man) but rather what one does through repeated acts—acts that have been going on before the person arrived (Butler, 1990). Using theatrical metaphors, Butler (1988) explained:

Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (p. 526)

Performativity, unlike performance, is not a thing but rather is an understanding of continuous subjectivity. To dismiss the misunderstanding that one can simply perform gender, Butler (1993) indicated the performance of gender is constituted by norms the subject does not choose, and performativity is a matter of repeating the norms to which they are constituted. In other words, subjects do not meaningfully perform their gender, rather their gender is constituted through unavoidable performances of social norms (McKenzie, 1998). Although there is an aspect of performance, the intention of the actor bears no meaning (Butler, 2004). Moving away from the drag reference, Butler (1993) defined gender as “an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the idea s/he is completed to approximate” (p. 231). By distancing performativity from the notion of performance, Butler “closes the gap between enactment and existence, and regulatory norms” (Smitheram, 2011, p. 58). Thus, a performative enactment of gender occurs through its repetition—repetition which is never complete. It is in the gap between what is performed and what is expected by the addressee where possibilities for resistance and change reside (Culler, 2000).

The notion of regulated power is central to Butler’s (1988) theory. Connecting power to the repetitive process of gender, Butler (1993) argued gender performances outside the theatre are governed by punitive and regulatory social conventions. Using the insult “queer” as an example, Butler (1993) argued the constitutive power of the insult comes not from the speaker but rather from the negative historical power of the term. However, the culturally sustained temporal dimension of performatives allows for the redevelopment of practices and terminology, as we have witnessed with the re-appropriation of the term queer (Butler, 1990). Thus, performativity does give way for the possibility of agency and political change through

repetition, but this “cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism, much less consumerism” (Butler, 1993, p. 15).

Influenced by Butler’s theory of gender performativity, Sedgwick (1993b) coined the phrase *queer performativity*. While not offering a concrete definition of queer performativity, Sedgwick explained the concept through the notion of shame: “in interrupting identification, shame too, makes identify. In fact[,] shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating” (p. 5). By queering performativity, Sedgwick refigured the nature of performance to create new dialogues about identity. Since shame has the potential to ground queer identity and queer pride (Halperin, 2009), it “remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that . . . has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities” (Sedgwick, 2009, p. 61). Butler (1997) also provided insight into the meaning of performativity in queer politics:

Coming out and acting out are part of the cultural and political meaning of what it is to be homosexual; speaking one’s desire, the public display of desire, is essential to the desire itself, the desire cannot be sustained without such speaking and display, and the discursive practice of homosexuality is indissociable from homosexuality itself. (p. 107)

The discourse of performativity has been widely used in literature, particularly in gender and queer research. With the aims of illuminating her own agency, Jackson (2004) argued performativity is helpful in providing a space for individual agency and collective difference. Arguing that agency lies in her resignification as a Southern White woman, Jackson (2004) indicated,

I am at once an expression of gender but also its possibility for resignification, which is a threat to that very expression. I am produced through certain power relations, but I am also a site for reworking those power relations so that something different and less constraining can be produced. (p. 685)

Similarly, Davies et al. (2001) discussed how the autonomous agent achieves agency. Using a method they referred to as *collective biography*, Davies et al. (2001) used Butler's performativity theory to analyze their memories of being subjectified as schoolgirls. By sharing their own stories, they argued subjectification is an ambivalent project and that it is through this subordination that resistance and opposition are possible. Relying on Butler's performativity theory, Ruitenbergh (2007, 2015) argued that to understand the possibilities for agency, the subject must understand the historical lineage and function of the discourses in which they participate.

The theory of performativity has also been extended to discourses in organizational management and space (Barthold, 2014; Borgerson, 2005; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Lucas & Wright, 2013; Nelson, 2010; Parker, 2001; Sommerfeldt, Caine, & Molzahn, 2014; Tyler & Cohen, 2010). The major aims of these studies were to explore how spaces can be conceptualized as being performative and to understand the subjectivity that occurs in organizational spaces. Gregson and Rose (2000) postulated existing locations and spaces (i.e., stages)

do not pre-exist their performances, waiting in some sense to be mapped out by performances: rather, specific performances bring these spaces into being. And, since these performances are themselves articulations of power, of particular subject positions,

then we maintain that we need to think of spaces too as performative power relations. (p. 441)

Analyzing festivals in Sweden, Lucas and Wright (2013) argued festival spaces “become performative when they act upon the transformations shaping it as it shapes them” (p. 11).

The first, and obvious, benefit of using performativity theory in a study on queer theatre festivals is that the theory is fundamental in queer discourse. The theory is also useful for understanding political strategies using subversion through parody, displacement, destabilization, and resignification (Butler, 1990, 1991). However, what types of subversions work best? How much failure is required to shift the constituted norms of gender identity and sexuality? Recognizing that politics and change are characterized by contingency and context, Butler deliberately did not offer prescriptive strategies or answers to such questions (Salih, 2002). If queer theatre festivals queer spaces traditionally read as heterosexual through performances that produce failure for an extended period, albeit terminal, then to what extent do they reproduce a “(re)reading” of these spaces moving forward? And what impact does this have on informally educating future groups of people who enter these spaces? Through incorporating performativity in this study, I have begun to answer such questions.

Performativity theory is also useful for understanding the ways in which meaning making occurs, as it is through the process of imitation and repetition subjects come into being (Butler, 1993). The potential for new meaning making and learning lies in the persistence of a discursive repetitive act. However, for learning to occur, it is necessary for the festival to provide a space for, and acceptance of, “open normativities: collectively crafted ways of being that shape subjectivities oriented toward widespread flourishing” (Shotwell, 2012, p. 990). If one does not take seriously the performance of the other, learning is unlikely to occur.

Recognizing that festivals give rise to communal experiences and represent a community, the emphasis on an individual's experience can be shifted to that of the wider community (Barthold, 2014). Indeed, the theory of performativity is critiqued for its individualistic focus (e.g., Bickell, 2005; Crawley, 2008; Lloyd, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999; Schlichter, 2011). To overcome this, several scholars have called for a performative-performance lens (Bickell, 2005; Langellier, 1999; Morison & Macleod, 2013). Given queer festival spaces and identity are likely to be mutually constituted, which will necessarily impact performance and the sense of agency, I too believe it is necessary to take a performative-performance lens. As Langellier (1999) argued, "performance needs performativity to comprehend the constitutive effects" (p. 136) and "performativity relies upon performance to show itself" (p. 136). A performative-performance lens also proved useful for situating myself in the research and for understanding how my performance may have been contested, challenged, and transformed.

ACT THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this act, I provide an overview of the methodology and methods used to investigate the extent to which queer theatre festivals contribute to the production of knowledge and learning, community building, and leadership and activism in the queer social movement in Canada. As noted in Act One, several questions guided this exploration:

- 1) How do performers, audience members, and festival organizers understand the social impacts and benefits of queer theatre festivals?
- 2) To what extent are queer theatre festivals sites of knowledge production and learning?
- 3) How are queer theatre festivals contributing to the work of the queer social movement and challenging heteronormative norms of society?
 - a) How do queer theatre festivals bring emerging social movement issues to the forefront?
 - b) How do the festivals and performances challenge heterosexist institutions and values (i.e., do the festivals promote homonormativity or challenge it)?
- 4) How do performers and festival organizers articulate leadership, activism, learning, and social justice, and how does this articulation impact their choice of artistic expression and the work curated at queer theatre festivals?
- 5) How are queer theatre festivals impacted and/or shaped by the neoliberal cultural economy they operate?
- 6) How do queer theatre festivals mobilize and foster critical consciousness, solidarity, and a greater sense of queer community?

I begin this act with an overview of qualitative research followed by a discussion on the queer(y)ing methodology employed in this study. I then discuss the other topics related to the

research design, namely the research sites, methods, data analysis procedures, data representation, trustworthiness and transparency, and ethical considerations.

A Qualitative Paradigm

As a queer researcher who takes queer theory seriously, I was presented with a dilemma that made selecting an appropriate research methodology one of the most challenging aspects of my research endeavour (see Figure 3). Due to the nature of my study and research questions, however, I was certain the methodology had to be qualitative. Yet, even in the realms of qualitative research, positivistic nomenclature and attitudes persist. As Ferguson (2013) argued, “qualitative methodologies and inquiries are shackled by scientific discourse” (p. 1) and there is a “need to cut the cords . . . from the scientific foundation that it was birthed from in the first place” (p. 3). It was thus imperative I remain reflexive of how I may be influenced by scientific discourse and that I resist the use of positivistic language and views.

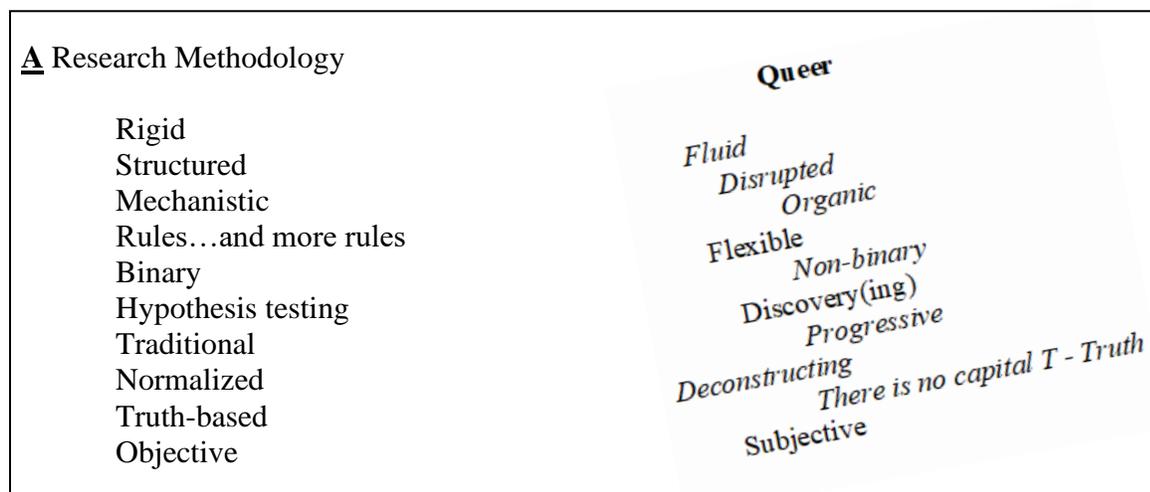


Figure 3: Words that come to mind when I think of a research methodology and the term queer

I have employed a qualitative research approach because qualitative research tends to be less objectifying of research subjects and is more concerned with cultural and political meaning making research. Further, qualitative methodologies are better suited for capturing experiences

and for providing a voice for those who have been marginalized. Particularly, qualitative research attempts to make the world more visible by making sense of people's lives, experiences, and structures of the world (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, the world or one's reality of it is not fixed, as is assumed in quantitative research (Merriam, 2002). Thus, "the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). As a result, qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Further, qualitative researchers embrace an ontological assumption of multiple realities and subjectivity (Norum, 2008), as do I.

Epistemologically, my research questions, which involve investigating the experiences and worldviews of individuals at queer theatre festivals, are grounded in evocation and subjectivity (Johnson, 2011). Evocation and subjectivity are antithetical to research purely grounded in a positivistic perspective and are seen as inhibiting the construction of knowledge (Hammers & Brown, 2004; Polk, 2017). In this, queer, pragmatism, social constructivism, and symbolic interactionism are bound together through postmodernism, and are concerned with subjective meaning rather than with objective structures—requiring the use of qualitative methodologies (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Carter & Fuller, 2016; Gergen, 1985; Plummer, 2003; Polk, 2017). As Sexton (1997) stated, "the perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative; phenomena are context-based; and the process of knowledge and understanding is social, inductive, hermeneutical, and qualitative" (p. 8). As a result, my study requires a qualitative methodology. There are, however, many qualitative

methodologies and several of them would be appropriate to interrogate queer theatre festivals. In fact, in describing qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated,

qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. As a site of discussion, or discourse, qualitative research is difficult to define clearly. It has no theory or paradigm distinctly its own. (pp. 6–7)

In the following section, I elaborate on queer qualitative methodologies and specifically outline the qualitative methodology adopted for this study.

A Queer(y)ing Methodology

Methodology is concerned with how we know the world or gain knowledge of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As I navigated the terrain of many methodologies, I found solace in several prominent scholars—*thinking friends*¹⁴ as Minnich (2005) referred to them—who have influenced my thinking about an appropriate queer methodology for this study. In this section, I will provide an overview of literature discussing queer methodologies and of the queer(y)ing methodology employed in this study.

Though there exists no definitive queer methodology to conduct queer research, several scholars have provided foundational heuristics for incorporating a queer perspective in research. For example, D. N. Warner (2004) argued because there is no one truth of sexual identity and sexuality, there can be no single queer research methodology but rather many. The concept of “queering” thus requires the use of methodologies for which researchers can interrogate that which is normative (M. Warner, 1999). D. N. Warner (2004) identified two basic heuristics a queer methodology should uphold:

¹⁴ Thinking friends are individuals whom we have thinking conversations with through oral exchange or engagement with their written work (Minnich, 2005). As Nicholson (2009) noted, thinking friends “help us build conceptual bridges” (p. 11).

First, queer research methodology should be reflexively aware of the way it constitutes the object it investigates. . . . When researchers are forced to acknowledge their role in knowledge production, we are already towards more equitable research. This leads us to a second queer heuristic, that it must qualitatively account for its object of inquiry. . . .

Qualitative approaches have a better chance of accounting for queer experiences in the same terms as the actual people living these experiences. (pp. 334–335)

Browne and Nash (2016) argued a queer methodology should enable a researcher to both challenge dichotomous understanding, normalcy, stability, and orthodoxies, and question the “existence and knowability of the social” (p. 14). Due to the fluidity and non-normative nature of the term queer, Browne and Nash believed researchers should apply their queer “re-theorizing, re-considering, and re-conceptualising” (p. 1) lens to their methodologies and choices of methods in order to illustrate the messiness of social life and the myriad ways of knowing.

In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam (1988) introduced queer methodology as a “scavenger methodology” (p. 10) that combines multiple disciplines and methods. Particularly, a “combination of textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 10) was employed. Drawing on the work of Halberstam and the links between intersectionality and queer theory, Fotopoulou (2012) suggested a queer methodology is a refusal of research norms that lock subjects into taxonomies. Fotopoulou argued for a hybrid research approach (i.e., one that employs multiple techniques such as essays of autobiographies, poems, cultural studies, and politics that all appear in the same text) that allows for research to be understood as a dynamic process that transforms both the researcher and participants.

The methodology adopted for this study, which I have called a queer(y)ing methodology, takes queer theory seriously. Queer is understood here not only as a noun and a verb, but also as an adjective and adverb (Levy & Johnson, 2011; Manning, 2009; J. Taylor, 2012; Thomas-Reid, 2018). As J. Taylor stated, “queer can be a political or ethical approach, an aesthetic quality, a mode of interpretation or way of seeing, a perspective or orientation, or a way of desiring, identifying[,] or disidentifying” (pp. 14–15). As a noun, queer is used to explore a way of *being* and to investigate how this way of *being* intersects and impacts social spaces (Thomas-Reid, 2018). As an adjective, it is used to describe someone (e.g., queer performer) and moments in time and spaces whereby heterosexual and homonormative perceptions are challenged by the presence of queer individuals (J. Taylor, 2012; Thomas-Reid, 2018). As a verb, the term is used to trouble and deconstruct binary, heteronormative, and homonormative notions (Manning, 2009; Thomas-Reid, 2018). In addition, it is also used as a verb as an act of activism. As an adverb—*to do something queerly*—it is used to understand performative behaviour in queer theatre festival spaces. As praxis, queer is used as a way of queering research methodology, methods, data analysis, and data representation. According to Levy and Johnson (2011), “when we queer something, we trouble or question its foundations” (p. 132). Particularly, a queering approach is used to retheorize, reconsider, reconceptualize (Browne & Nash, 2016), interrogate, and mess with normalized approaches to research methodology, methods, data analysis, and data representation.

The aforementioned queer scholars and other queer thinking friends have been influential in developing the queer(y)ing methodology adopted for this study. Drawing on these thinking friends, the methodology incorporated the following six heuristics:

- 1) **Qualitatively accounts for my subjectivity** and that of the researched, including sexual subjectivity that can occur in queer social settings.
- 2) **Reflexivity** in the field and in the analysis of the data in order to acknowledge the partiality of me as the researcher and my role in knowledge production.
- 3) **The stability between identity binaries**, such as the researcher-researched, home and field, and insider-outsider, are challenged.
- 4) **Intersectionality** is taken seriously to understand the multi-identities of queers and how these multi-identities factor into meaning making and people's understanding and behaviour in festival spaces.
- 5) **Normalcy is challenged and the invisible is made visible** through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates several theoretical lenses (as discussed in Act Two), research methods, and modes of data representation.
- 6) **A strong ethics of care was upheld** in conducting and in writing up the research.

A queer perspective contends “subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming,” and a qualitative methodology is best suited to uncover unstable subjectivities and social experiences (Browne & Nash, 2016, p. 1). However, the queer(y)ing qualitative methodology adopted for this study also acknowledged erotic subjectivity. This acknowledgement is particularly important in research spaces, such as the sites in this study, whereby sexuality, sexual desire, and performing sexuality are active (Waling, 2018). As a result, erotic subjectivity was acknowledged by being reflexivity aware of the presence of my sexual feelings and desires and that of participants in the field (Plummer, 2003).

I engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process by maintaining a detailed journal. Specifically, I reflected on my performativity and personal disposition while in the field

(Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Rooke, 2016), the research process (Adams & Jones, 2011; Bergold & Thomas, 2012), on social relationships I formed in the field (Bergold & Thomas, 2012), and how to analyze the data in a way that was sensitive to context and reflected the experiences, views, and meanings of participants (Adams & Bolen, 2017; Gore, 2018). This reflection proved productive for numerous reasons. For example, I identified early on in the interview process that asking participants how they identified (i.e., sexuality and gender)—which was intended to be one of the warm-up questions—failed to achieve the desired rapport-building I had hoped for. Rather, the question made interview participants uncomfortable and was misguided, as it failed to consider the potential fluidity of their gender or sexuality. As a result, I eliminated this question from my interview process. During my second interview, I also realized the term queer had the potential to be problematic when the participant stated, “I wouldn’t identify as queer.” Following this interview, I asked permission to use the term, explaining why I chose to use the term to frame this study (as noted in Act One). Reflexivity also proved fruitful in the early stages of my data collection process as I realized I was attracting more male interview participants. As a result, I took a concerted effort to attract more intersectional queers to participate in the study.

Related to reflexivity was how I embraced “the reciprocal nature of the researcher–participant relationship” (Dowling, 2008, p. 748). I approached the research process, and particularly the semistructured interviews, with a perspective of being a *cosearcher*. As the term suggests, being a cosearcher meant that the interviewee and myself together made sense of the festivals and our experiences at them. This perspective allowed me to think beyond the “dualisms of insider/outsider,” which “can never . . . capture the complex and multifaceted identities and experiences of researchers” (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2016, p. 109).

The cosearcher approach to conducting interviews will be discussed further when I review the semistructured interview method employed in this study later in this act.

The queer(y)ing methodology adopted in this study also provided an opportunity for me to interrogate the binary notions of the “home” and “field.” I did not understand the field to be some distant place I was visiting. Not only was one of my field sites in my home city (i.e., Victoria), but the sites were also an ontological home of being in a comfortable queer space where I felt I belonged (Rooke, 2016). I viewed the notion of the field as being flexible and fluid in my study, and in a sense, the field followed participants and me (Jackman, 2016; Rooke, 2016). Groups of festivalgoers—me included—often left the festival sites at the end of the evening to gather and socialize in other spaces. By not maintaining the boundaries of the field and home, I did not “silence the dynamic play of desire that shapes fieldwork relationships” (Jackman, 2016, p. 113). Doing so would not only have muted the potential sexual nature of the field but would also have perpetuated homonormative attitudes about sex and eroticism.

Not only was intersectionality taken up by including it as a theoretical perspective, but it was also taken seriously in the methodology adopted for this study by incorporating it in the research design. Intersectionality was important in this study because to “focus on only the discrete and the coupled forms of oppression [e.g., race and sexuality] is to fail to address, and is to be complicit with, the supplementary ones” (Kumashiro, 1999, p. 505). The methodology moves away from an additive analysis of intersectionality (Windsong, 2018) and toward a more holistic view based on McCall’s (2005) intercategorical approach as discussed in Act Two. Particularly, intersectionality was taken up in the research design by encouraging participants to speak to their multiple identities in relation to their experience at the festivals. Intersectionality

was also taken up by reframing queer studies—queer studying—to include the intersectional relationship among various discourses (Boellstorff, 2016), a heuristic I turn to next.

The fifth heuristic employed in my methodology was a challenge to normalcy and making the indivisible visible through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates several theoretical lenses (as discussed in Act Two), research methods, and modes of data representation. Queer is by definition something or someone that is at odds with the normal (Halperin, 1995). Thus, in adopting a queer(y)ing methodology, it was necessary to challenge normalcy and capture the multiple perspectives of participants. To do so, I employed multiple research methods and modes of data representation, including creative forms. The methods and modes of data representation will be discussed in detail later in this act.

A significant concern for ethics of care was considered in conducting and in writing up my study. Not only was I cognizant of ensuring all voices were heard, especially “views from the margin” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 9), I also sought to disrupt stable understandings of sexuality, gender, and sex while ensuring a strong ethics of care (Panfil & Miller, 2015). One of the ways in which a strong ethics of care was upheld was by avoiding the use of binary-based categories while interviewing participants and in writing up the study unless participants identified themselves according to a binary label (Ferguson, 2013). As previously noted, I was careful to ensure that in analyzing and in writing up the data I captured participant stories in a way that was sensitive to context and accurately reflected their experiences, views, and meanings. To help achieve sensitivity and accuracy, detailed verbatim quotes are used as a way of giving a voice to participants and to help describe as accurately as possible their views and experiences (Panfil & Miller, 2015). Another way in which I upheld a strong ethics of care was to incorporate elements of autoethnography in my queer(y)ing methodology, which I discuss next.

Elements of Autoethnography

In addition to the methodological discourse of queering, my methodology also drew on elements of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a commonly used methodology in queer research (e.g., Adams & Bolen, 2017; Adams & Jones, 2011; Browne & Nash, 2016; Jones & Adams, 2016; LeMaster, 2014). It is a useful methodology for extracting meaning from experience and for critiquing “the situatedness of self and others in social context” (Spry, 2001, p. 710). As Jones and Adams (2016) argued, “autoethnography . . . hinges on the push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural[,] and political concerns” (p. 198). In this regard, it was useful for this study to position myself in the research and detail my experience as a participant observer at the queer theatre festivals. Specifically, the use of autoethnography allowed me to explore, “describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). By intertwining the wider societal context to my performances and the observed performances of others at the festivals, I was able to make a wider connection between lived experiences and societal structures. As Leggo (2010) articulated, “our storied lives are never only unique and idiosyncratic accounts of individual and isolate experiences. Instead, our stories are always part of a network of communal and collaborative stories, a network that knows no beginning and no ending” (p. 53).

The advantage of autoethnography stems not only from gaining greater insight into the culture and social spaces of queer theatre festivals and making connections between my personal experience and the experience of research participants. For instance, autoethnography allowed me to write from my perspective things research participants may not have been ready or willing to share (Adams & Jones, 2011; Jones & Adams, 2016). Rather than simply writing about the

observations of individuals and thus possibly describing experiences participants may not have been comfortable seeing in a published text—such as their sexual encounters—I could talk about these experiences from a first-person perspective. Talking about these experiences from a first-person perspective also helped to uphold a greater ethics of care on my research participants and those I observed.

I also used autoethnography because of its creativity and innovation as a radical and activist format that provides space for voices that have been marginalized (Jones & Adams, 2016). As Ellis and Bochner (2006) stated,

the last thing I want is for autoethnography to be tamed, “I respond.” Autoethnography shows struggle, passion, embodied life, and the collaborative creation of sense-making in situations in which people have to cope with dire circumstances and loss of meaning.

Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act. (p. 433)

Finally, autoethnography was useful for ensuring and maintaining research reflexivity throughout the research process (Browne & Nash, 2016; Denzin, 2006a; Plummer, 2003). For Jones and Adams (2016), queer autoethnography “encourages us to think through and out of our categories for interaction and to take advantage of language’s failure to capture or contain ‘selves,’ ways of relating and subjugated knowledges” (p. 207).

Sites of Analysis

Three queer theatre festivals were explored in this multisite study: The Rhubarb festival in Toronto, Ontario; Pretty, Witty, and GAY! in Lethbridge, Alberta; and OUTstages in Victoria, British Columbia. These three sites were carefully selected because of their uniqueness and differences in location, size, and histories as theatre organizations. Further, they were chosen

because of their ease of access. The OUTstages festival was an obvious choice because it is held in Victoria, British Columbia, where I was studying, and because I am the past Vice President of the Board of Directors of Intrepid Theatre.

All three festivals are run by nonprofit theatre organizations. Rhubarb is run by Buddies in Bad Times Theatre; *Pretty, Witty, and GAY!* is put on by Theatre Outré; and OUTstages is run by Intrepid Theatre. Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and Theatre Outré are queer theatre companies that focus on presenting and producing queer work. Intrepid Theatre does not produce theatre performances nor do they solely present queer work; however, the organization has been presenting and promoting queer theatre work at its various festivals for decades. In the sections that follow, I provide a summary of the festivals and their respective organizations.

The Rhubarb Festival: Buddies in Bad Times Theatre

Founded by Sky Gilbert, Matt Walsh, and Jerry Ciccoritti in 1979, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre is the longest-running and largest queer theatre company in the world (Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, n.d.-a; Nestruck, 2015). The Rhubarb festival has been a staple festival run by the organization since its inception in 1979. In 1979 and 1980, the company ran a spring and fall Rhubarb festival. In 1981, Rhubarb became an annual festival. In describing the festival, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (n.d.-b) stated:

Rhubarb transforms Buddies into a hotbed of experimentation, with artists exploring new possibilities in theatre, dance, music, and performance art. Rhubarb is the place to see the most adventurous ideas in performance and to catch your favourite artists venturing into uncharted territory. (para. 1)

The 39th Rhubarb festival ran from February 14–25, 2018. All festival events took place at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre located on Alexander Street in Toronto—in the heart of The

Village (commonly referred to as the “Gay Village”). With a population of roughly 3 million, Toronto is the fourth largest city in North America and is quite liberal, with many different queer establishments and organizations (City of Toronto, 2018). Buddies in Bad Times Theatre consists of three main performance spaces, The Cabaret, The Ante Chamber, and The Chamber. All three spaces were used for the Rhubarb festival. The Cabaret, an event space community members can rent for functions—including club nights—includes a bar that serves alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. During Rhubarb, festivalgoers could purchase alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages from the bar and were free to bring their drinks with them to the other two spaces. The Chamber is where Buddies in Bad Times presents their main stage season shows. During the Rhubarb festival, the space is divided in half to form two performance spaces. However, only one performance occurred at a time. The Ante Chamber is a small room that was used for the special exhibitions.

The 10-day festival (there were no shows on Monday or Tuesday) with over 100 performers and artists consisted of 12 performances ranging in topics from intersections of queerness (e.g., race, class, religion, age), queer activism, coming out, trans, indigeneity, queer sex, climate change, identity issues, misogyny, capitalism and consumerism, sexuality and sexual fluidity, politics, and consent to White privilege, all under the same roof. There were six performances each week and all six were presented each night for 5 days starting at 8:00 p.m. Two shows would take place at a time, one in The Cabaret and the other in The Chamber. As festivalgoers arrived at 8:00 p.m., they would pick the show they wanted to see first, and 30 minutes later when that show was over, they would either stay in the same theatre or move to the other space for the next performance. To move to the other theatre, festivalgoers would line-up

in each space and enter the other space once both performances ended. A festivalgoer could, therefore, see three of the six weekly shows in a single night.

In addition to the 12 performances, there were 10 special one-night only presentations (e.g., a bi visibility cabaret, a karaoke party, a Latina drag king dance party, a deaf cabaret), three presentations by Buddies in Bad Times Emerging Creators Unit (an initiative that provides mentorship to emerging queer artists), and two preshow panel discussions (one on creating performances on the subject of variations in mental illness and the other on how to finance the creation of art). From Wednesday to Friday of each week, there was also an installation festivalgoers could explore in The Ante Chamber. One of the installations was an interactive celebration of the vagina and the other called on festivalgoers to consider their presence in the sacred space of the Anishinaabe. Several of the performance nights were sold out, and the majority of the other nights were above 80% capacity.

Unique to Rhubarb was that there was a single cost (\$20) to see all performances each night. Admission to the special presentations was included in the evening pass. Admission to the Emerging Creators Unit performances was by donation, and the preshow panel discussions were free. A limited number of pay-what-you-can tickets were also available every day of the festival on a first-come-first-serve basis. To help offset costs for all audience members, the organization ran, as it does throughout the year as well, a free Buddies Awards program where audience members could receive discounts after they purchase two 1-day festival passes at full price.

Pretty, Witty, and GAY!: Theatre Outré

Pretty, Witty, and GAY! is a small festival that has been produced by Theatre Outré since the organization was founded by Jay Whitehead in 2012 (Theatre Outré, n.d.). Prior to the creation of the organization and festival, however, the cabaret, a staple of the festival, was a one-

off event Whitehead started in 2004 (Wilcox & Whitehead, 2016). Initially held in a small acting classroom at the University of Lethbridge, the cabaret has grown substantially in size over the years and is now held at larger venues in downtown Lethbridge (Wilcox & Whitehead, 2016). The 2018 festival with over 30 artists ran from February 26, 2018 to March 4, 2018 and consisted of a three-day run of a mainstage show, *The Confessions of Jeffrey Dahmer*, a club night (i.e., Panty Raid), and the cabaret. The Panty Raid party hosted by Didi (Jay Whitehead's drag persona) was a dance party with Didi as the DJ and with the majority of patrons clothed only in their underwear. The cabaret included musical acts, dance, drag, poetry, and other theatrical performances and covered a variety of topics including religion, body image, coming out, queer family, trans, activism, misogyny, sex, politics, sexual and gender identity, queer allyship, and self-acceptance. Tickets to both the cabaret and the mainstage performances were \$20 and entry to the Panty Raid event was \$10.

The 2018 festival was slightly smaller than in other years when the festival also included a play reading, drag and poetry nights, and additional parties at Club Didi. The Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival and Theatre Outré's mandate overall are to "provide an uncensored and uncompromising voice to those in our community who are often considered to exist beyond the fringes of social propriety, sexual norms[,] and gendered expectations" (Theatre Outré, n.d., para. 5). Both the sold-out mainstage theatre performances and the club party took place at Club Didi. The cabaret, with upwards of 150 people in attendance, took place at the Southern Alberta Ethnic Association Centre just on the edge of downtown Lethbridge. During the cabaret, Theatre Outré ran a bar where attendees could purchase alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Theatre Outré is located in downtown Lethbridge on the second floor of a historical office building. The space operates both as a membership-based club, Club Didi, and as a theatre

performance space. The capacity of the space is about 60 people. Club Didi is unique in that it operates as a private club that serves as a queer community hub for Lethbridge, as there are no other queer clubs in Lethbridge. People who attend any Theatre Outré events at Club Didi must purchase a \$5 membership. When not operating as a theatre space, Club Didi has various community events throughout the month including open mic nights, naked yoga, drag nights, cabaret events, game nights, and every Friday is a club night. In describing the space, Jay Whitehead (as cited in Sylvester, 2014) stated,

Club Didi was always intended to be first, and foremost, a theatre and performance space for our Theatre Company, Theatre Outré (pronounced *ooo-tray*). As operators of the space, we are theatre professionals and educators, and we felt . . . that there were no performance spaces in Lethbridge that were intimate and “outré” enough for the kind of theatre we wanted to do. The events we hold at the club—that are not part of our theatre season—have grown out of the community’s claiming of the space as a much needed queer space in our city, and help to fund our theatre projects. . . . We actually prefer not to identify ourselves as a ‘bar’ but rather a queer space where members can commune and enjoy entertainment and each other’s company without fear of judgment. We like our patrons/members to feel they are part of the space—they have ownership of it – and [are] not just customers. (p. 11)

Wilcox and Whitehead (2016) indicated Theatre Outré’s experience as a relatively new theatre company resembled the initial years of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre.

Located in Southern Alberta, Lethbridge is a smaller city than Toronto and Greater Victoria, with a population just under 100,000 people (City of Lethbridge, 2018). The City is the fourth largest in Alberta and is known for its “staunch religious and political conservatism . . .

[and its] larger than average populations of Mormons, Herderites[,] and Dutch Reform congregations” (Wilcox & Whitehead, 2016, p. 1). Despite being a conservative city, Lethbridge does have a liberal arts university that infuses a counterculture to the conservative stronghold (Wilcox & Whitehead, 2016). For some, such as Jordan Tannahill (as cited in Wilcox & Whitehead, 2016), a well-known queer Canadian artist, it was a surprise the theatre company even existed:

It’s something of a miracle Theatre Outré exists at all: a vital queer theatre company, with a year-round facility, in the middle of the Albertan Badlands. They are more than a cultural space in Lethbridge; they are a paradigm shift. (p. 1)

Though the City of Lethbridge has no official gay village, it does have an annual Pride festival that began in 2007 and in 2016, the city unveiled the city’s first rainbow crosswalk (Mikkelsen, 2016).

OUTstages: Intrepid Theatre

OUTstages is a medium-sized festival in comparison to Rhubarb and Pretty, Witty, and GAY! Run by Intrepid Theatre in Victoria, OUTstages—“a decidedly queer theatre festival” (Intrepid Theatre, n.d.-c, para. 1)—is a relatively new festival launched in the summer of 2015. Running from June 19–24, 2018, the festival kicked off the annual Victoria Pride festival and consisted of four mainstage productions, a youth cabaret presented by youth for youth; a play reading of a coming-of-age story about two queer teenage boys—one who was trans and another who was cisgender; a curators talk; a festival kick-off social; and a special presentation by the University of Victoria’s Transgender Archives. Through drag, musical acts, poetry, spoken word, and theatrical performances, the topics included trans, two-spirit, indigeneity, coming out stories, identity issues, intolerance, bullying, homophobia and transphobia, violence toward queers,

queer intersectionality, belonging, religion and spirituality, the connection between humans and their environment, body issues, loss and isolation, politics, and community building. In describing the programming for the 2018 festival, OUTstages Festival curator Sean Guist (as cited in Intrepid Theatre, 2018) stated, “this year’s programming takes a look at the power of community, dives into queer history, explores identity, and just might be a cure for what ails us (if that’s a live-signing drag queer in an old time tent revival?!)” (para. 2).

Intrepid Theatre is a theatre-presenting company founded in 1986. Initially created to run the Victoria Fringe Festival, the company has expanded over the years and now runs three major festivals (UNO Fest, Victoria Fringe Festival, and OUTstages), an annual You Show program that supports local artists to develop and showcase their work, and a year-round presenting series. Though not a dedicated queer theatre company, the company has presented queer work at its various festivals. The mandate of the organization is to “enhance awareness and appreciation of contemporary theatre, by encouraging, developing, and presenting new and/or experimental work for public performance, and the promotion of new artists and their work through theatre festival production” (Intrepid Theatre, n.d.-a, para. 1).

Intrepid Theatre runs two venues: The Intrepid Theatre Club located inside the main office building of Intrepid Theatre, and Metro Studio, a theatre space owned by the Victoria Conservatory of Music and rented year-round by Intrepid Theatre. Intrepid Theatre Club is a small black box theatre with a maximum seating capacity of about 55. Metro Studio is a larger theatre with a maximum seating capacity of 185. During the 2018 OUTstages festival, three of the mainstage productions were at the Metro Studio Theatre and the other performance was at Intrepid Theatre Club. The mainstage performance at the Intrepid Theatre Club had two viewings. Of the three mainstage performances at the Metro, two were 1-night-only

performances and the other had three viewings. The play reading, youth cabaret, and special transgender archives presentation, which were 1-night-only events, were all at the Intrepid Theatre Club. The festival was well-attended; two mainstage shows were sold out and attendance at all other performances and events varied between 75% and 90% capacity.

Advanced ticket prices for the mainstage performances at the Metro Studio Theatre ranged from \$25 to \$35. The mainstage performance at the Intrepid Theatre Club was \$20. The youth cabaret and play reading events were by donation, and the Transgender Archives presentation was a free event. For the second year, Intrepid Theatre ran a Youth OUTreach program that offered youth under 25 years of age up to two free tickets to attend any mainstage performance. At all events other than the youth cabaret, there was a bar serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and candy bags before, and often after, the performances. Following the youth cabaret, there was a pizza party where audience members and festivalgoers socialized.

With an estimated population of 92,041 in 2018, the City of Victoria is smaller than Lethbridge (BC Stats, 2018). However, using the population of Victoria is misleading as the capital region district of Victoria stands at over 413,000 people (BC Stats, 2018). Like Lethbridge, Victoria has no official queer village and has an annual Pride festival that began in 1993. Victoria is a very liberal city and in 2015, the city painted a rainbow crosswalk near the only gay bar in the City.

Research Methods

This qualitative study employed a three-stage approach to data collection: participant observation, a postcard questionnaire, and semistructured interviews. This array of methods provided diverse opportunities for people to participate.

Participant Observation

My role in this study was that of a participant researcher. As a result, I used participant observation as a foundational data collection method. Kawulich (2005) explained participant observation

is more difficult than simply observing without participation in the activity of the seeing, since it usually requires that field notes be jotted down at a later time, after the activity has concluded. Yet there are situations in which participation is required for understanding. Simply observing without participating in the action may not lend itself to one's complete understanding of the activity. (para. 23)

Participant observation lent itself to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, and particularly, it was useful for understanding the dynamics of the community and the sense of community, solidarity, and shared meaning that exist in queer theatre festivals (Kawulich, 2005; Lichterman, 2002). Participant observation provided me with several additional benefits: (a) it gave me the privilege of observing all aspects of the festivals (i.e., a broader range of data); (b) it allowed me to “fit in,” reducing the likelihood of people changing their behaviour because of my presence; (c) it prepared me for conducting the semistructured interviews (e.g., additional questions to ask, starting point to begin conversations with participants, and in-depth meaning to situations participants described in interviews); (d) it was useful for gaining entry, building trust in the community, and for attracting participants to interview; and (d) it provided me with a more holistic understanding of the festivals by observing behaviour rather than simply relying on participant interviews (Bernard, 2006; Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995a; Lichterman, 1998).

Participant observation combined with the other data collection methods also allowed for triangulation—looking for similarities and differences between what people said in interviews and in their responses to the postcard questionnaire with their behaviour at the festival. One of the weaknesses of interviews is that sometimes interviewees are unable or unwilling to share certain aspects of their experience. However, participant observation can overcome this weakness (Balsiger & Lambelet, 2014). Specifically, participant observation is useful for avoiding

suspect self-reported data: There are some topics for which people cannot or will not accurately report their own behavior [*sic*] . . . Participant observation can lessen this form of self-report bias and obtain a more valid understanding of these behaviors [*sic*]. (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013, p. 81)

Observation was participant-based, largely overt, and semistructured (Flick, 1998). Though festival organizers and many people, with whom I interacted, knew I was there conducting research, there were also likely many people who were not aware. However, my presence as a researcher was made highly visible through several means. First, I hung posters in the lobby spaces of the festival sites that included a picture of me, described my research, and included my contact information for those who wanted to participate in a semistructured interview or to learn more about the research project. Second, my visibility as a researcher was heightened by handing out postcard surveys to other festivalgoers as they left festival events. Third, while conversing and socializing with people at festival events, I indicated I was conducting research at the festival.

As suggested by Creswell (2009), an observation protocol was established for conducting the observations. Observation data collection sheets were prepared in advance of entering the

field and were semistructured. The categories and elements observed allowed for a holistic observation and for substantial opportunity to record observations that fell outside of these broad categories. With a concern for trying to not bring attention to myself as a researcher in the field and make people potentially feel uncomfortable, I recorded my detailed observation notes in between performances and events and at the end of each night in the field. In several cases, I recorded brief observation notes (i.e., jot notes) in a small journal I carried around with me or by using the notes application on my cell phone while at festival events. The latter served especially useful for not bringing additional attention to myself. The notes were useful for recalling observations and conversations I had while in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). Every few days, detailed field notes were created from my observation sheets. As DeWalt, Dewald, and Wayland (1998) argued, field observations are not data unless turned into field notes. The field notes were both descriptive and reflective. This approach allowed for the generation of thick descriptions (e.g., long descriptions and moving excerpts) and was useful for capturing my own experiences as a participant in the field (Creswell, 2009; Geertz, 1973; Weiss, 2011).

While in the field, I also occasionally used my cell phone to record videos and take pictures. Although taking pictures and recording videos while conducting participant observation can make a participant observer stand out and cause the people being observed to change their behaviour (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013), these were not concerns given the public domains in which I took the pictures and recorded the videos (e.g., cabarets and other festival social events where many people were taking pictures and recording videos). These images and videos were useful for me to recall the field setting and to write my observation and field notes. As I did not ask permission to use any pictures or videos of others, I do not include any in my study.

Prior to entering the field, I contacted festival organizers at all three festivals via email to obtain permission to attend the festival as a researcher. The organizers were all very welcoming and supportive and took great interest in the research. Support ranged from offering to hang posters to attract research participants or setting up tables in the lobby of the entrance to the theatre spaces to helping create a drop box for the postcard questionnaire. Over the course of the festivals, I regularly checked in with the festival organizers to ensure no issues had arisen due to my presence. Thankfully, no issues or concerns were raised. In fact, one organizer noted that by talking to artists I helped the artists better articulate what their performance was about. The research participant jokingly went on to state, “maybe I should hire an academic to go see all the shows and then talk to the artists about their show.”

Overall, I conducted over 54 hours of participant observation at the three festivals (approximately 28 hours at Rhubarb, 10 hours at Pretty, Witty and GAY!, and 16 hours at OUTstages). Participant observation was conducted at all theatre performances, panel discussions, and social gatherings I attended. Between the three festivals, I attended 51 different events.

Semistructured Interviews

The second data collection method was in-depth semistructured interviews. Interviews are among the most frequently used qualitative strategy to collect data (Brinkmann, 2008). Semistructured interviews are most useful when the topic, such as this one, is based on personal experience (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 2002). This practice (a) allows the person being interviewed to be more of a participant in meaning making, rather than a conduit from which information is retrieved (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006); (b) empowers the participant to share stories and to describe their experience from their own perspective, using their own terms, ideas, and frames

of reference (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Welle & Clatts, 2007; Witkin & Altschud, 1995); (c) promotes a more egalitarian relationship with interviewees (Taylor, 1998); (d) encourages participants to introduce new research questions based on their own lived experiences (Taylor, 1998); and (f) gives greater control to the researcher in creating a safe and comfortable space that encourages the participant to openly share stories, information, and feelings they may not share in a group setting (Witkin & Altschud, 1995).

The selection of participants was largely based on purposeful and snowball sampling, particularly, criteria sampling (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). Specifically, interview participants had to have attended at least one of the three theatre festivals in 2018. Participants were classified into three groups: (a) festivalgoers, (b) performers, and (c) festival organizers (i.e., curators, artistic/executive directors, board members, or staff members of the festivals). To ensure representation from all sexual orientations and gender identities, I ensured I interviewed a cross-section of individuals so I had representation from the various groups of people attending the festivals (e.g., queers, lesbians, trans, two-spirit, bisexuals, persons of colour, different ethnicities, gays, straight allies, various age groups). The cross-section of individuals interviewed provided a more enriched analysis as it offered insights into the meaning and understanding of queer theatre festivals from those who have experienced an intersection of multiple forms of oppression. In a few cases, participants offered names and contact information of other participants (i.e., snowball sampling).

Seventy people were interviewed in total; 32 from the Rhubarb festival, 13 from Pretty, Witty and GAY!, and 27 from OUTstages. Two participants attended both Rhubarb and OUTstages, which is why the total number of participants from the three festivals adds up to 72 and not 70. Of the 70 interview participants, 24 of them were performers, nine were festival

organizers, and the remainder were audience members. However, there was a blurring between these classifications. For instance, all but three of the performers I interviewed also saw performances, as did all festival organizers. Several festival organizers were also performers at the festivals. The interviews took place between February 21, 2018 and August 20, 2018. To ensure maximum recall, the majority of interviews for each festival occurred in the first 2 weeks following the end of the festival. Interviews ranged in length from 32 minutes to just over 1.5 hours. Overall, nearly 57 interview hours were recorded. This length range does not include the preamble time before the interview (i.e., small talk prior to starting the interview and a detailed review of the participant consent form). Aside from six people who wanted to be interviewed with another person (three interviews were conducted with two participants), all interviews were individual. Interviews were recorded using a voice recording application on my cell phone and a Sony audio recorder. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. To ensure participants felt comfortable and safe, I allowed them to decide the place where we would meet. In addition, if they were not comfortable with or available to meet in person, I gave them the option of doing the interview over the phone. Of the 70 interviews, 42 of them were held in person and 28 were over the phone.

I was mindful of the potential power dynamics that can occur between the researcher and the researched in a qualitative interview (Hammers & Brown, 2004). As previously noted, I approached each interview as a cosearcher. As a cosearcher, I approached the interview from the perspective that both the interviewee and me were searching to understand our experiences at, and the significance of, queer theatre festivals. This metaphor was based on two other metaphors discussed in the literature: “the traveller” (Kvale, 2007, p. 19) and the “co-researcher” (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2016, p. 101). Kvale (2007) stated

the interviewer-traveller wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people ~~he or she~~ [they] encounters. . . . The interview traveller . . . walks along with the local inhabitants, asks questions[,] and encourages them to tell their own stories of their lived world. (p. 19, emphasis added)

Gorman-Murray, Johnston, and Waitt (2016) stated “the ‘co-researcher’ is not a panacea but a plea to think outside the dichotomy of researcher/researched” (p. 101). However, participants in my study were not involved in the actual collection of data or design of the research. The cosearcher metaphor was merely used as a way to construct the interview. My approach as a cosearcher served to breakdown the researcher/researched binary and led to the interviews functional more as conversations between friends. As a result of this approach, the interviews were more organic and fluid and stimulated in-depth conversations resulting in rich data.

Each interview began with a few minutes of small talk, usually about something related to how we first met (e.g., “How was the rest of your night yesterday?”), about their performance (e.g., “Your show was absolutely wonderful!”), or about something general like their day at work. I then proceeded to review, rather formulaically, the consent form. The majority of participants were bored while I reviewed the consent form. However, I did notice a shift when I began discussing anonymity. For each participant, I provided them with a personalized example of how I would not write up something they said. For example, imagine you—yes literally you the one reading this dissertation—were interviewing me. The statement you would say to me would go something like: “I would not write that a PhD student from the University of Victoria who is initially from Ontario stated . . .” This approach usually garnered a chuckle from the participant, and many of them began to appear more relaxed. Before having the participant sign the form or verbally consent (if interview was by phone), I also discussed the usage of the term

queer, and following my aforementioned second interview, I asked each participant for permission to use the term. No participant took issue, in fact most supported me in using this term. However, three participants did indicate it was not a term they would use to identify themselves (two of them were straight). During the interview, I was extremely cautious to avoid the use of identifiers (e.g., lesbian, gay, trans) and refrained from using she/he pronouns unless the participant referred to themselves as such.

The formal interview process began once participants signed or verbally agreed to the consent form. Semistructured, open-ended interview questions were prepared prior to entering the field. Each interview participant group (i.e., festivalgoers, performers, and festival organizers) had a different set of questions. The flexibility of the structure of the interview allowed me to *move around* the questions in a more organic and natural way and allowed for greater fluidity in participants sharing their narratives and experiences. This interview approach facilitated deeper discussions and allowed the interviewee to have a level of control over the interview process. I began each interview with a very general open-ended question that served as an icebreaker question (Creswell, 2009). After the first few interviews, I examined my approach and made minor changes to the questions.

Though I used a notepad during interviews, I refrained from making detailed notes and only jotted down keywords to serve as a reminder of something important or as a prompt to probe for follow-up and further explanation once they finished their thought (Creswell, 2009). This approach to notetaking allowed me to maintain eye contact (for in-person interviews) and to deeply listen to participants' stories. I avoided interrupting participants and on numerous occasions, interviewees went into great detail—in many instances going off topic. But there was great value in this approach, as some of the most fruitful data I collected was when people went

off on tangents. On many occasions, the response to my first open-ended question answered several other questions I had. Though all of the prepared questions were covered in one way or another, no single interview followed the same order. The interview truly was more like a conversation between two acquaintances who shared an interest in queer theatre, and the questions flowed naturally.

During my conversations with participants, I found many of them were just as interested in hearing my thoughts about the festival and my research in general as I was in learning about their experience. This cosharing resulted in rich data and some of the most interesting stories from participants came from connections through this sharing (Heckert, 2016). To my surprise, the majority of the interview participants expressed their gratitude for having their voices heard. The feedback revealed many participants found the interview brought about additional self-awareness, empowerment, therapeutic, and/or transformative benefits. In a study investigating participants' experiences in interviews, Wolgemuth et al. (2015) also found these and other benefits can accrue during interviews with research participants.

Postcard Questionnaire

Though not common, the third data collection method used was a postage-paid qualitative postcard questionnaire (5 in. x 7 in. [12.7 cm x 17.78 cm]) distributed at all three festivals (see Figure 4). Postcards are an engaging, nonthreatening, anonymous, and simplistic data collection approach that has been found to effectively generate quality data from community events involving a large number of people (Guzys, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, & Threlkeld, 2015; Hutton, Roderick, & Munt, 2010; W. King, 2001). In addition, it has been found that the use of postcards results in a higher response rate and is less costly than traditional paper surveys (W. King, 2001). Focusing on festivalgoers' overall opinions of the festival and their experience, the

postcard questionnaire asked audience members to respond to a single-open ended question:

“What do you believe are the benefits of the festival and the performances you have seen?”

Respondents were asked to write a response, a poem, dialogue, or draw or doodle.

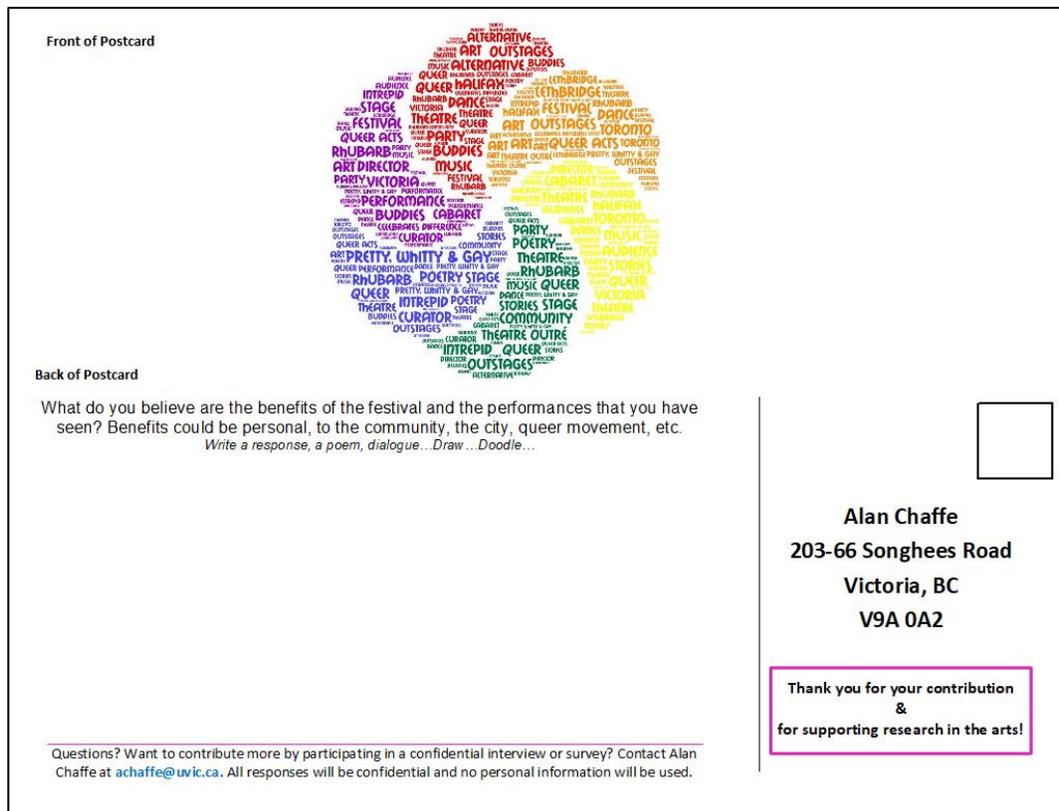


Figure 4. Postcard questionnaire handed out to festivalgoers.

The reason for including the postcard questionnaire was to reach a broader perspective, provide an additional opportunity for people to participate in the study—especially those who did not have the time or who did not feel comfortable participating in an interview—and to provide a creative outlet for an arts-loving crowd to respond. Given festivalgoers are interested in the arts, I expected they would respond more favourably to a postcard that asked for their opinion and encouraged a more open response—one that would allow them to respond in a way that suits them (e.g., poetic response, script format, image). At all three festivals, I handed out the postcards to audience members as they were leaving festival events. The festival events for

which I handed out the postcards were randomly chosen. When I handed out the postcards, a short conversation about the purpose of my research was discussed. Though I felt it was necessary to provide information about the research I was conducting, having this conversation meant I was not able to hand out as many postcards because of the additional time it took to provide this information. Most festivalgoers with whom I spoke with took the postcard. Overall, I handed out the postcard questionnaire following four performance events at Rhubarb, two events at Pretty, Witty and GAY!, and four performances at OUTstages.

In addition to handing out the postcards following performances at OUTstages, several were left beside two drop boxes at both festival venues. I did not use a drop box at the other two festivals. The drop box was created because of a discussion with OUTstages festival organizers, who had also designed their own audience survey and created a drop box of their own. From their experience, they had better response rates to past surveys when they created a drop box for festivalgoers. To track which festival the postcards came from, I marked the bottom left-hand corner of the postcards I handed out at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! with the acronym “PWG” and marked the OUTstages posted with the acronym “OUT.” I did not mark the postcards from the Rhubarb festival, as it was something that I did not realize I should do until after this first festival. Because I had marked the postcards handed out at the other two festivals, I was able to identify all postcards from the Rhubarb festival (i.e., postcards returned with no acronym were from the Rhubarb festival).

A total of 275 postcards were handed out/taken and 38 were returned, representing a rate of return of nearly 14%. Specifically, 100 postcards were handed out at the Rhubarb festival with 14 returned, 60 were handed out at Pretty, Witty and GAY! with six returned, and 115 were handed out at OUTstages with 18 returned (four of which were left in one of the drop boxes).

The Pretty, Witty and GAY! festival had the lowest completion rate of only 10%, followed by Rhubarb with 14%, and OUTstages with 16%. Though very few (only three) people responded creatively (using a drawing or poem), the major benefit of using this additional data collection method was I was able to engage and include a wider range of voices in the research.

A Hybrid Approach to Data Analysis

I used a multistep thematic data analysis process similar to Creswell's (2009) suggested approach to analyze the data from the three data sources and across the three festivals. A thematic analysis is a useful approach for examining different perspectives by highlighting similarities and differences in and across research sites, summarizing large data sets collected across multiple methods, and uncovering unanticipated findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; N. King, 2004). The first step in the data analysis process was the preparation of the data. As I previously noted, field observations were recorded into field notes and interviews were transcribed verbatim. The field notes, interview transcripts, and postcards were organized by festival. I then read through all of the data, starting first with the data for the Rhubarb festival, then Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, and, finally, OUTstages. As this was the first time reading through the data, my goal was to obtain a "general sense of the data and to reflect on its overall meaning" (Creswell, 2009, p. 185). Though I recorded notes in the margins during the first round of review, no analysis or coding occurred.

After my initial review of the data, I reread the data for each festival and began the coding process. However, I examined the data for each site separately. Following a review of the data for each festival, codes were developed according to Creswell's (2009) suggested approach of using codes based on key topics discussed in the literature, codes not anticipated, unusual codes, and codes that addressed a greater theoretical view. These categories were, for the most

part, labelled with terms based on the language used by a participant in an interview or a response on a postcard questionnaire (i.e., in vivo coding) and similar categories were grouped together (Creswell, 2009). In vivo coding was useful for maintaining a greater connection to the terms used in my data sets and for giving greater voice to research participants (A. King, 2008). Themes were then created based on the coding process (Creswell, 2009). I followed this coding process for each festival. I relied on cross-site synthesis, where I examined the findings for each individual festival and then compared these findings across all three sites (Yin, 2014). The synthesis allowed me to tease out the similarities and differences across the three festivals.

The data collected from the multiple methods and sites allowed for triangulation. Unlike Yin (2014), who argued the use of multiple data sources is to assist in identifying a convergence of themes, the benefit of multiple sources stems from Stake (1995), who argued triangulation can be used to identify divergence. When a researcher focuses too much on convergence it can result in outliers being overlooked, as divergence may tell researchers as much about the phenomena under study as convergence. The goal in analyzing the data across the various sources was thus not about getting rid of things that did not “fit,” but rather the extent to which I allowed a space for what did not seem to fit. This approach meant embracing “multiplicity, misalignments, and silences” (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p, 17) and understanding knowledge as partial and situated (Nash, 2016). It also meant avoiding the pitfall of grand narratives “so that [all] the voices of marginalized communities [within the queer community] are included” (Jensen, 2012, p. 373). Borrowing from Charmaz (2008), a useful metaphor to understand this approach is “views from the margins” (p. 9). Charmaz explained, “[a] view from the margins may emanate from difference; it may also offer significant differences in knowledge, meanings, and priorities—a distinctive view, another course of action” (p. 9). For instance, by using both interviews and

participant observation, a researcher can uncover discrepancies between people's actions and what they say (Gillham, 2000).

Modes of Data Representation

How do I write a queer text that speaks with my participants in a way that is “increasingly careful, sensitive, and ethical . . . with editing and telling their stories, doing my best to make sure their words couldn't be used against them . . . [and in a way that is] less invasive and more collaborative, less opportunistic and more respectful” (Adams & Bolen, 2017, p. 101) while ensuring a wide range of voices in order to honour my participants? The answer to my question was to use a more experimental strategy of data representation using multiple forms (Adams & Bolen, 2017; J. Gamson, 2000). Specifically, the results were written up using a blend of participant voices using found poems, performative utterances, and traditional long verbatim passages from interview transcripts and completed postcard surveys. My experience and voice are weaved between these representations; however, they are not privileged. These personal utterances are based on reflections and observations I recorded while in the field.

At times, verbatim quotes from a number of participants across the three festivals were combined to form a quote collage. Similar to the writing praxis of *métissage*, the quote collages are useful for enabling “researchers and their audiences to imagine and create plural selves and communities that thrive on ambiguity and multiplicity” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 143). The quote collages also served as another way of queering the text and were useful for providing a collective perspective across the three research sites, incorporating a wider range of participant voices, and honouring those who dedicated their time to participate. Rather than presenting the findings linearly by research site, I discuss them together. However, I did make note of any anomalies that existed in the findings between festivals. Though pseudonyms were used, as will

be discussed next, combining the findings across festivals also provides an additional layer of anonymity. This additional layer was important as the queer artist community is not exceptionally large.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of interview participants. Though I initially gave participants the option of choosing their own pseudonym, I had—to my dismay—not followed through on participants choosing a pseudonym. Of the 70 interview participants, six chose their own pseudonym. After several of the participants added me to social media, I learned the pseudonyms created by two individuals were the names they went by on their social media platforms. I also later learned a pseudonym provided by another participant was their name prior to transitioning. Though these participants were likely aware that their choice of pseudonym was the same as their name on social media platforms or was their prior-to-transitioning name, I could not be certain they realized how easy it may have been for people reading this dissertation to identify them. This dilemma is something I should have discussed with these participants. I regret not doing so, and I hope I have not taken away their sense of agency by not using the pseudonym they created. In addition, five other participants indicated I could use their real name when quoting them. Though I wanted to respect their wishes, I also decided to assign them a pseudonym. After reviewing the data, I had significant concerns that using the real names of these five participants could expose other research participants who wanted to remain anonymous.

The use of multiple data representation forms may sound complex and messy, but as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued, “we are in a new age where messy, uncertain multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation” (p. 15). Further, the use of

multiple data representations helped to describe the unexplainable and to more authentically express and encompass the full multiplicity of experience, multilayered with diverging and converging stories (Prendergast, 2009). As Eisner (1995) argued, “the primary tactical aim of research is to advance understanding” (p. 3) and there exists great potential to make use of “different forms of representation to uniquely influence our experience, and thus, to alter the ways in which we come to understand the world” (p. 1). In addition, the use of multiple data representation forms allowed me to include a wider range of participant voices in my study. Doing so was my small way of showing my gratitude and to honour the participants without whom I would not have this data. Finally, the various forms provide a queer(y)ing of the text I explain with the following “found-ish” poetic utterance:¹⁵

A queer text should challenge norms—In fact, I think it must!¹⁶

*New ways of seeing involve new ways of doing
Dialectic voices need to play*

Just as I believe we should fuck with the binary
Gender and sexuality, invariant no more

Queer research and queer methodology must be “fucked with and used in resistant and transgressive ways” (Browne & Nash, 2016, p. 9)

So too, should the research text

*I am inspired by Fels (1999) who broke the rules of a traditional thesis with aha moments
Through endless footnotes and poetic and performative utterances*

Creative forms such as poetic and performative utterances “authentically express human experiences” and ways of knowing that words often cannot accomplish
(Prendergast, 2009, p. 561)

“The emphasis on lived experiences and emotional contexts in poetic representation can increase understanding” (Carrol, Dew, & Howden-Chapman, 2011, p. 628).

¹⁵ A found poem is a poem constructed using direct quotes from others and offers an arts-based approach to presenting literature or research findings (Prendergast, 2006). I refer to the poem here as a “found-ish” poetic utterance because I have inserted my own voice as well as direct quotes from others.

¹⁶ Emphasis—denoted by italics—is my own. There are three ways to read this utterance: One, in its entirety; two, the left justified italicized text only; three, the right justified text only.

Performative writing “evokes worlds that are other-wise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight” (Pollock, 1998, p. 80). It “features lived experience, telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life” (Pelias, 2005, p. 418).

*My voice will not be tucked away ghost like behind the text
Nor will my participants—my cosearchers*

I will display our embodied reflections and stories.

Structurally and stylistically defiant where necessary, simplicity elsewhere
Displaying our authentic voices

*“In telling our [embodied] stories, we [will] make sense of our lives” . . . and
“find windows into beginning to try to know the unknowable Other” (Snyder-Young, 2011, p. 943).*

*Uncovering our stories will “free . . . [us]. . . from the forces of oppression
that continue to silence . . . [our] . . . body[ies] and voice[s].” (Abdi, 2014, p. 8)*

Through our stories—upfront and in yer-face
I invite readers to be coperformers, cosearchers
In a story of “social resistance and social critique” (Denzin, 2003b, p. 196)

Transparency and Trustworthiness

Terms associated with quantitative studies such as reliability and validity, which assume a single account of social reality, have no relevance in qualitative studies and were not used in my study (Bryman, 2004; Butler-Kisber, 2010). Yet, my goal was to be as transparent as possible in describing the research process (Butler-Kisber, 2010) because transparency permits readers the ability to evaluate whether the chosen methodologies and methods were appropriate for the research question (Saumure & Given, 2008). Since the researcher in qualitative research is the primary research instrument for data collection and analysis, it is necessary for them to reflexively account for the influence they may have had on the study (Merriam, 2002; Saumure & Given, 2008), as I have.

As I previously noted, multisite studies are useful for acknowledging multiple realities and for incorporating multiple meanings of a phenomenon. Though multiple meanings occur,

accuracy and trustworthiness depend not on generalizations across time and space, but rather on how careful the researcher is in applying a consistent research process and in recognizing and reflecting on how the research investigation is not neutral (Gillham, 2000). A multisite study is also useful for establishing accuracy and trustworthiness across the data collected from each site (Gillham, 2000). Accuracy and trustworthiness were achieved in this study through a high degree of reflexivity and through the use of data collection protocols (e.g., observation collection sheets and prepared semistructured interview questions). The use of multiple methods also increases trustworthiness, as the data from different sources can be compared, allowing for a more holistic understanding of phenomena and for triangulation (Fetterman, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014).

Ethical Considerations and the Importance of the Human Research Ethics Board

Anyone who has conducted qualitative research involving humans understands the monotonous and drawn-out, bureaucratic process of applying for ethical approval. The process can be even more complicated when conducting research on vulnerable and marginalized populations such as queers. After submitting my Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) application, I was asked to respond to a number of queries. The primary focus of the questions and the additional information asked for was around ensuring there would be no power dynamics between potential research participants and me and my processes to minimize harm. As I responded to the queries, I felt personally attacked at times and was quite distraught: Why would I want to do any harm to people in my own queer community? Why would I force someone to participate? Did the HREB think I was going to tie someone up and force them to participate in an interview? Was it not clear from my research questions, approach, and my personal connection to the field the risk of harm was extremely low? As I worked my way through the responses, I reminded myself the HREB at the University of Victoria did not know me, and their

bureaucratic and overregulated approach stemmed from the history of harm researchers have committed. What I did not consider at the time, however, was they were also protecting me!

Prior to the start of a performance at one the queer theatre festivals, I had a great conversation with another festivalgoer—a typical occurrence at all festivals. As we conversed, the individual expressed a great interest in participating in the study. However, the individual indicated they had accessibility issues that prevented them from doing the interview in person or over the phone. Due to their interest, I gave them my business card and suggested they get in touch with me, and I would forward a few questions for them to answer. A few days after the festival ended, I received an email from the individual. We continued to communicate via email for several months. After my first email response to the individual on the timeline of my project, my second email to them included the participant consent form and six brief questions they could consider responding to. These questions were all taken from the semistructured interview questions submitted to the HREB.

Several months after our initial correspondence, I received an email with a response to my questions. The response was 43 pages, albeit the margins were large and so too was the font size. In their email, the individual requested their response be included in my dissertation as an appendix in its entirety and as formatted. I responded to them indicating this request was out of scope for my project and was uncommon. I had asked them if it was necessary their response be included as an appendix, as I was not comfortable doing so. I provided several reasons: This was not common practice, it was not the intention of the project as per my participant consent form, and it would significantly privilege their voice over all the other research participants. Rather than responding to my email, the individual contacted the Chair of my department and then sent two emails to the HREB. As one can imagine, the individual's actions caused me a great deal of

stress. The saving grace was the support I received from the HREB. They quickly got in contact with me to discuss the issue and left the decision of how to proceed up to me. I immediately informed the HREB I would delete all data provided by the individual, and I would not make use of their 43-page response in my study. Rather than having to continue dealing with the individual, the HREB stepped in and dealt with all ongoing correspondence with the individual. It was during this ordeal I realized the importance of the HREB. By ensuring my ethics application was “iron clad,” the HREB was not only protecting participants, but they were also protecting and supporting me as a researcher.

Though the individual’s data was excluded from the analysis, their perspective was useful for recognizing there are “people or perspectives or observations outside the sample” (Duneier, 2011, p. 8) and for acknowledging “inconvenient phenomena” (Duneier, 2011, p. 8). This recognition was significant because it led me to reflexively ask whether there were others who might testify my account of people’s experiences had been biased toward those I had come to know (Duneier, 2011). As I reflected on this potential bias, I began to think about these other groups and tried my best to incorporate them into the study. One group noticeably absent from my study are people with hearing loss such as the performers of *Deaf That!* and members in the audience during this performance at Rhubarb.

Another potential ethical dilemma I failed to consider a priori was the possibility for sexual desires and relationships to emerge when fully engaging with queer subjects in queer settings. As a user of gay dating apps (e.g., Grindr, Scruff), I ended up meeting several people online while attending the festivals; two of which became research participants and close friends. Though nothing of a sexual nature occurred between these two individuals and me, there existed a mutual desire. During these moments, my “observer hat” came off and I was a “fully-fledged”

participant. By embracing my desiring body and allowing the mutual flirtatious situation to continue with these two festivalgoers, I participated more fully in the festival and came to have a deeper understanding of the nature of the festivals (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). Particularly, it was in these moments where I realized queer theatre festivals were spaces with other desiring bodies and where some people not only met new friends, but also sexual partners.

These encounters also provided me with additional access and information while in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). For instance, I met a few friends of the individuals, some who were either performers or who had worked for the theatre company. These connections provided me with additional insights of the festival and research participants I may not have otherwise obtained. In addition to the flirtatious encounters, there was one sexual encounter with a different festivalgoer towards the end of the Rhubarb festival. This individual offered to be a research participant, which created a dilemma for me in terms of ethical considerations. In the end, I decided not to interview the individual for risk of there being potential or perceived ethical issues. As I reflected on these early experiences in the field, I realized the necessity to be reflexively aware of myself as a sexually situated subject and observer in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010; Rooke, 2016).

ACT FOUR SCENE ONE: A QUEER SPACE

In this previous act, I discussed the queer(y)ing qualitative methodology and the three methods to data collection (i.e., participant observation, semistructured interviews, and a qualitative postcard questionnaire). In this act, I present the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis. Themes were developed according to Creswell's (2009) suggested approach of using (a) codes based on key topics discussed in the literature, (b) codes not anticipated, (c) unusual codes, and (d) codes that address a greater theoretical view. All of the data were triangulated to increase understanding and meaning of the data and to note and further analyze possible incongruencies. The discussion of the themes and the supporting subthemes is separated into three scenes. The first two themes—the cocreation of the queer festival atmosphere and culture and a queer liminal home that fostered a sense of *communitas*, solidarity, and belonging—are discussed in this scene. Following a brief pause for reflection, the theme of festivals as pedagogical spaces is discussed in Scene Two, and the final two themes—vibrations of change and queer cultural leadership and activism—are discussed in Scene Three.

The findings have been written using long verbatim texts, found poems, and personal utterances. As discussed in Act Three, it is my belief a mixing of data representations better captures the multiple understandings of queer theatre festivals and the various voices of participants. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of interview participants, and the festival the participant attended is stated in brackets. The exception to this rule is when I provide a quote that provides identifiable information about a participant. Specifically, there were a few instances where stating the pseudonym and festival of a festival organizer or performer would increase the likelihood of a participant being identified. When this possibility arose, I simply referred to the participant as “an organizer” or “a performer.” I also do not provide the festival

name for comments made by performers who discuss the theme(s) or key message(s) of their performances because this too would increase the likelihood of identifying them. I also refrain from using binary pronouns (i.e., he, she), binary genders (i.e., male or female), LGBTQ2S labels (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans), race, ethnicity, or any other personal identifiers for participants unless they identified themselves by such identifiers.

The Cocreation of the Queer Festival Atmosphere and Culture

Festivals are liminal spaces consisting of physical sites and performative constructs that offer a unique social and cultural atmosphere in contrast to one-off events (Bennet, Taylor, & Woodward, 2014; V. Turner, 1982). In describing the culture and atmosphere of the festivals, many participants compared the theatre festivals to one-off performances. For example, Quinn (PWG), a festivalgoer stated:

A festival allows a person the opportunity to see a vast array of different shows by different companies with different people in a short amount of time. . . . There's a different culture around a festival that is important. . . . There is this really well-built culture around the whole festival atmosphere that makes seeing the theatre and being able to talk about the theatre really soon after you've seen a show. . . . It all really adds to the theatre experience in a way. . . . You don't get that from a one-off performance.

For many other participants, Quinn's "festival atmosphere" and "well-built culture" were the salient features that contributed to their positive experience. Though others used words such as celebratory, entertaining, supportive, friendly, and welcoming, the four most frequently used terms were inclusive, social, safe, and experimental.

The overarching atmosphere and culture of the festivals were created through a complex negotiation between festival organizers—who, as Pielichaty (2015) once argued, are able to

manipulate festivalgoers' experiences and their actions and behaviour in the space, and festivalgoers. For festival organizers, the design and structural elements were in fact deliberately planned, something also noted by Merriman (2009) in their review of the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival. Festivalgoers, however, were not passive recipients, but rather engaged participants. Particularly, festivalgoers impacted the culture and atmosphere of the festivals by being their vulnerable and authentic selves and by experimenting with their appearance and behaviour in the festival spaces. These subthemes are explored in this section.

A Stage-Managed Festival Space: Inclusive, Social, Safe, and Experimental

One of the salient features of the study was the crafting of the festival atmosphere. Many research participants, especially organizers, discussed how the festival spaces were intentionally managed or curated. In describing the festival spaces, participants alluded to several design and structural elements of the festivals that fostered the creation of a queer cultural space and atmosphere and promoted a sense of inclusion, the social, safety, and experimentation. The design and structural elements included (a) the use of less traditional performance spaces, (b) the programming of nontraditional theatre performances, (c) gender-neutral washrooms, (d) a focus on consent, (e) affordable ticket pricing, (f) a duty of care, and (g) a sexual flair.

Less traditional performance spaces. As participant Amelia (Rhubarb) argued, traditional theatre spaces can cause people to feel “pressured to act and to behave in a certain way, and that expectation can be very stressful.” Yet this pressure was nonexistent for participants at the queer theatre festivals thanks in part to the many nontraditional aspects of the performance spaces. With the exception of OUTstages, a significant factor was that one of the major performance spaces at both Rhubarb and Pretty, Witty, and GAY! also operated as queer nightclubs. These club spaces are well-known to queers in their respective cities as social and

welcoming spaces for them. Although Holt and Griffin (2003) and J. Taylor (2008) argued a limitation of club spaces is that they often cater to certain queer communities—typically younger middle-class White queers—I found culturally constructed expectations that these spaces were largely inclusive and safer for queers. As Kuan (Rhubarb) noted,

I feel super comfortable there . . . It's a lot less formal than I think some other theatre spaces [are]. It feels more social and [safer] than other theatres. Part of that is likely because it's a queer club as well.

A second factor that made the space less traditional was the inclusion of bars at various venues inside rather than outside the theatre space that offered alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages. The bar was open before, during, and after many performance events. Though having a bar provided financial resources to the theatre festivals, as organizers noted, it was also deliberately used to elevate the social atmosphere, creating “a party atmosphere” (Ben, OUTstages) and serving as a source of what Amelia (Rhubarb) called “celebration.” Audience members agreed that the bar enhanced the social atmosphere of the festivals. Bae (Rhubarb) explained:

It may seem funny but going to the festival bar itself allowed for conversations and deeper connections with artists. Libations are always good for that. And with thought-provoking shows, you want to chat about them with the artists.

For Quinn (PWG), the bar not only gave him the chance to see and talk to a performer, but also to socialize with others.

Though common in most traditional theatre spaces, the festivals had communal areas where people could hang out and/or take a breather from festival events. The difference, however, was rather than serving as merely gathering spaces before and following a

performance, these communal spaces were sites for self-care practice. For example, Bae (Rhubarb) “found that the space in the basement of Buddies was useful for those emotional moments when I needed to decompress” and to connect with others on an emotional level. On several occasions at the Rhubarb festival, I also took a break from seeing shows by resting in the communal area. In the communal area, I socialized with other festivalgoers but the space the also provided a sense of safety—an emotional break—as I wrote in my journal:

February 22, 2018. On my way to Rhubarb tonight I heard the news that Raymond Cormier was found NOT guilty of second-degree murder in the death of Tina Fontaine—a 15-year-old First Nations teenage girl. It was obvious from the somberness of the festival and the chatter I overheard that this news had impacted many festivalgoers, including myself. . . . This news really hit me as I watched the performance *Gashigwaaso*, an Indigenous performance. . . . Following the performance, I took a break in the lobby area in the basement to get away from the crowd. It was a relatively subdued and sombre space with whispered conversations happening about the trial and the performance *Gashigwaaso*. . . . As I sat there, I felt oddly safe and supported even though I was surrounded by strangers. . . . I was able to sit with my emotions and allow them to percolate in a space that felt safe to do so.

Festivalgoers did feel a sense of safety in the performance spaces, as I will discuss in the section on queer embodiment; however, the lobby and communal areas were spaces away from the “hustle and bustle of the festival” (Riley, Rhubarb). Having a space for festivalgoers to reflect on emotional reactions is imperative to thinking through subjects and personal narratives—something that is often taboo in other theatre spaces (Association of British Theatre Technicians, 2016).

Nontraditional and experimental theatre performances. During the interview process, I asked participants to describe queer theatre and queer theatre festivals. The majority described the festivals as consisting of nontraditional performances that included an array of performance styles and genres and participatory aspects that broke down the fourth wall.¹⁷ Indeed, for Halferty (2006), queer theatre in particular “actively involves its audience and does not rely simply on traditional plot, character, dialogue, and theme to make plays” (p. 131). For many participants, breaking the fourth wall helped elevate the social aspect of festival spaces:

The one thing about traditional theatre is that it is not very community building and is very individualistic. There’s a really big separation from the audience and the performers. But the festival is the opposite from that . . . and there is a lot of social interaction happening because it’s [i.e., the performances] not traditional. (Jo, OUTstages)

For others, the festival performances were nontraditional because “voices of the marginalized and oppressed are at the forefront, first and foremost” (Tobby, OUTstages); they were “without boundaries or borders or . . . rigid rules [typical in traditional theatre performances]” (Tanisha, Rhubarb); and they provided “an openness to . . . the experimental nature of theatre” (Raúl, Rhubarb). Whether it was sitting inside a tent next to a stranger and participating as in *Pearle Harbour’s Chautauqua* (OUTstages), sitting in the dark on a carpet as in *Noor* (Rhubarb), being asked direct questions without answers, as in *The Communist Manifesto for Children* (Rhubarb), or watching a performer in the nude holding up a mirror to showcase all angles of his body (PWG cabaret), there was an experimental aspect to many performances. This experimental aspect fostered a cultural space and atmosphere that was not only “more inclusive” (Tanisha,

¹⁷ The fourth wall is an invisible, imagined wall that separates performers from the audience.

Rhubarb) and “more safe” (Tobby, OUTstages), but also acted as a queering strategy to celebrate difference and to challenge to the hegemonic heteronormativity of theatre norms.

Creation of gender-neutral washrooms. Intrepid Theatre Club (OUTstages) and Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (Rhubarb) had permanent gender-neutral washrooms. In fact, the creation of gender-neutral washrooms at Intrepid Theatre Club was initiated as a result of the first OUTstages festival (Ben, OUTstages). Unfortunately, the washrooms at Metro Studio Theatre (OUTstages) and the washrooms at Club Didi (PWG) were not permanently gender neutral. Rather, the gender-segregated washrooms at these venues were temporarily converted into gender-neutral washrooms during events run by the two theatre organizations by putting up signs “over top of the men and women” (Jenni, PWG) logos. Jenni (PWG) explained, “the reason that they aren’t gender-neutral washrooms is because we do share the washrooms with about 10 other businesses.” The same was true for Metro Studio because the theatre is owned and operated by the Victoria Conservatory of Music (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Gender-neutral restroom signage at Metro Studio.

Participants, particularly nonbinary individuals, indicated the gender-neutral washrooms were important “for helping people feel comfortable and safe in the space. . . . They are

important for someone who isn't as comfortable or who is afraid of being called out or harassed" (Jo, OUTstages). Gender-segregated washrooms promote gender-based surveillance and can be sites for hostility, verbal harassment, physical assault, anxiety, fear, and/or stress for transgender and gender nonconforming people (Cavanagh, 2010; Herman, 2013). Andi (OUTstages), who identified as a trans male, felt the presence of gender-neutral washrooms was also symbolically important. He stated:

They are very symbolic . . . It is putting your money where your mouth is because it's this practical thing . . . that people need. It's also this greater symbol of showing you will go the extra mile to accommodate, to make it inclusive . . . to make people feel safe.

By going the extra mile, the presence of gender-neutral washrooms challenged fixed gender binaries to stabilize meaning and the performativity of gender. As Butler (1990) claimed, gender is performative. Thus, forcing individuals to choose which gender-segregated washroom to enter is a performative act as it constitutes one's gender identity. The gender-neutral washrooms challenged the policing and regulation of gender by creating a safer and more inclusive space for everyone (Davies, Vipond, & King, 2019). Interestingly, none of the participants brought up the presence of urinals designed for individuals with a penis in what would have been the traditional men's washroom. To my surprise, the presence of such urinals did not lead to self-regulating behaviour by festivalgoers who would have reified gender-binary washrooms—an occurrence I have observed in other spaces such as the gender-neutral washroom in the University of Victoria Student Union Building.

Another observation that surprised me was despite the gender-binary washrooms at the *Pretty, Witty, and GAY!* cabaret, there was little adherence to the binary segregation. Several self-identified women used the prescribed male washroom and vice versa. The lack of adherence

was significant in that it suggests regulatory practices that govern genders were temporarily suspended or at least minimized at the festival and “suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance” (Butler, 1999, p. 175). This dissonance occurred because the anatomy of a cis lesbian using the male washroom (i.e., having a vagina) does not align with the implied anatomical requirement for the male washroom (i.e., having a penis), and vice versa for a cis gay male (Magni & Reddy, 2007).

Unique to OUTstages, was that festival organizers provided pronoun buttons to festivalgoers (Figure 6). Festivalgoers could choose from various options a button with their preferred pronoun. Wearing a pronoun button eliminated the possibility of other festivalgoers using the wrong pronoun when conversing with others. As a few interview participants from OUTstages noted, the buttons also served to foster inclusion and safety for trans and nonbinary festivalgoers.



Figure 6: Example of a pronoun button handed out at OUTstages.

A focus on consent. With the exception of OUTstages, consent was also a common theme injected into the festivals by organizers. At the Rhubarb festival, the importance of consensual relationships was alluded to in the opening remarks prior to the start of many of the festival performances. The Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival took a more direct and visible approach. As soon as you entered Club Didi, festivalgoers were bombarded with images on the

walls about consent (see Figure 7). Though the campaign was in large part due to the fact the space also operated as a club, it was an important feature of the festival, as an organizer noted:

We are making sure that people realize that you know “no is no,” and anything less than an enthusiastic freely given “yes” is a “no.” People can’t consent when they’re intoxicated. . . . It’s not just about sex, it’s everything. Like even being aware of taking a photo [or] a Snapchat and being aware of who’s in the background and whether they’ve consented to be in that photo or not is important. . . . And I think the community really appreciates this. . . . It is like we’re watching, we’re also here for you. (Jenni, PWG)

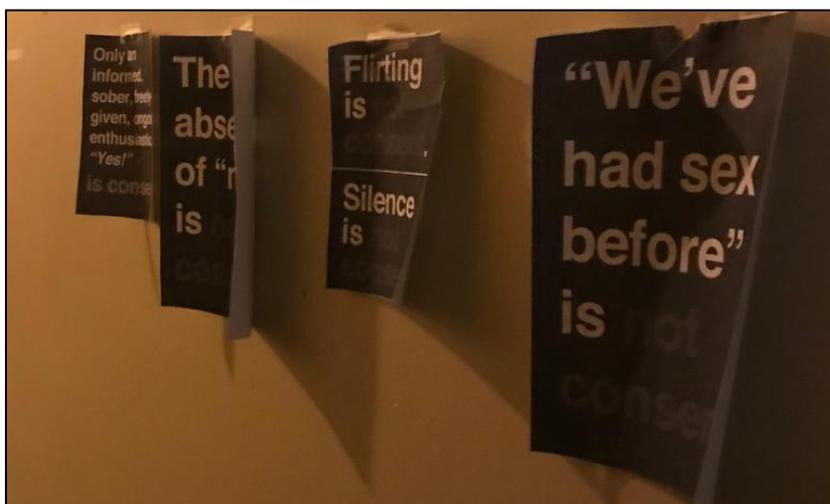


Figure 7. Picture of one of the walls entering Club Didi. From right to left, the posters read, “We’ve had sex before is not consent;” “Flirting is not consent” and “Silence is not consent;” “The absence of no is not consent;” and “Only informed, sober, freely given, ongoing enthusiastic ‘Yes!’ is consent.”

Four Pretty, Witty, and GAY! interview participants addressed the importance of the consent campaign in helping to establish a culture and atmosphere of safety. Emmett (PWG) explained, “consent is a major topic these days and I noticed at the festival that the organizers are taking this serious, and I think it helps provide a more secure and safe environment.” For Sam

(PWG), the focus on consent was not only important from a safety perspective but also, they felt it gave people the opportunity to express themselves freely without fear of being harassed or judged.

General admission and affordable ticket pricing. Unlike traditional theatres with fixed pricing and assigned seating, the festivals promoted inclusion, social interaction, and a sense of safety through general admission and affordable ticket pricing. General admission provided festivals goers with the freedom of movement, and increased opportunities to converse with strangers seated or standing beside them. Niki (Rhubarb) explained:

[It was] nice because I walked into the theatre and saw someone I really wanted to talk to about their performance. So, I chose to sit next to her. . . . I find there are more opportunities to interact and socialize . . . which is not the same for reserved seating shows.

Kanesha (OUTstages) took it further, however, through the lens of class: “There wasn’t, you know, those people in the expensive seats and me in the poor seat[s].” Important here is audience members were not gentrified or classed according to their ability to pay, and this lack of formality around seating arrangements, and particularly the nondistinction between so-called rich and poor seats, provided a “more inclusive environment” (Jose, Rhubarb).

Ensuring accessibility and affordability was also a priority expressed by festival organizers. As mentioned in Act Three, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre ran a free Buddies Reward program that offered patrons discounts after they purchased the first two tickets at regular price. The Rhubarb festival also provided a number of pay-what-you-can tickets for each night of the festival and a limited number of free one-night tickets to members of the Buddies youth program. Through a partner organization, the Crush Collective, OUTstages offered free

tickets to youth under the age of 25. In addition, the festival also sold three-show shareable festival passes for \$60 (\$20 per show) to keep prices “more affordable” as one organizer stated. In addition, both OUTstages and Rhubarb offered free festival passes to performers and offered free events and events by donation. Though the Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival did not offer specific programs, they did offer discounted tickets to those who expressed financial difficulties.

Queers, and particularly trans, Indigenous, queer people of colour, queer youth, and queer women, are overrepresented among low-income Canadians (Heath, 2018; Markwell & Waitt, 2009). The pricing structures at the festivals helped to facilitate a more inclusive rather than elitist cultural space by opening up the theatre doors to low-income queers. Unlike the excessive ticket prices for other theatre performances and Pride festival events, queer theatre festivals thus do not privilege as much those bodies “thoroughly disciplined according to neoliberal logic” (Nixon, 2017, p. 100). As a result, festival organizers have in a small way attempted to create spaces “for those bodies most stigmatized and devalued under neoliberalism” (Heath, 2018, p. 128). This is important in the queer community, as neoliberalism has heavily influenced the queer movement and has led to queer cultural spaces being dominated by White middle-class gay men, while disenfranchising more marginalized queers (e.g., working class, trans, youth, non-White racial and ethnic groups, bisexuals, and queers with disabilities; Drucker, 2011; Duggan, 2003; J. Taylor, 2014a; Valocchi, 2017). As a result, queer cultural and social capital can be acquired at queer theatre festivals by queers of broader socioeconomic status. Despite being relatively more affordable and accessible to low-income queers, four participants (two from Rhubarb, one from Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, and one from OUTstages) felt more could be done, as Niki (Rhubarb) argued, to “address the class thing so it is even more inclusive.”

A duty of care: Festival programming and the modeling of intersectionalities. What I call a duty of care was also a central finding of my study—most often linked to modeling—and this duty of care also enhanced the sense of inclusion and safety. For Aiyden, a queer person of colour, “Rhubarb is inclusive to most of the queer community, specifically when it comes to race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity.” There were many performances about queer people of colour and for him, these performances made him feel more welcomed, safe, comfortable, and valued. A similar sentiment was shared by eight Indigenous-identified participants (six from Rhubarb and two from OUTstages) on the showcasing of Indigenous voices.

Some participants compared the level of inclusion at the festivals to other queer spaces and acknowledged the role organizers (particularly curators and artistic/executive directors) played in “intentionally programming diverse” voices (Billy, OUTstages). White, Rich, O’Clarke, and Fung (1999) reminded us, “when one programs a festival, one also programs the audience and the community” that attends. Curators and artistic/executive directors at all three festivals felt one of their responsibilities was to showcase queer multiplicities. As one curator explained, “my programming is my reach out to different communities to ensure they are represented and feel included and safe in the space.”

Several festivalgoers and organizers acknowledged the challenge festivals, and particularly smaller ones, have in showcasing performances from multiple intersections of the queer community. Though the majority of audience members and performers at all three festivals felt the festivals were largely inclusive and diverse, a few participants from Rhubarb and OUTstages argued there could be more performances focusing on queer people with disabilities. In addition, two participants from Pretty, Witty, and GAY! felt there needed to be more

performances by people of colour, and “more should be done to reach out to the two-spirit community” (Liam, PWG).

Not only did festival organizers “walk the talk” by creating a diverse festival program, but festival organizers also took other actions to promote an inclusive, social, safer, and experimental culture and atmosphere. They used proper pronouns when introducing artists, were present and energetically worked the room, and—with the exception of Pretty, Witty, and GAY!—made land acknowledgements during the opening remarks at every festival event.

In terms of contributing to the experimental aspect of the festivals, festival organizers often queered their bodies and used their bodies as a way to encourage others to experiment with their own bodies. One organizer indicated they wore heels as a way to encourage festivalgoers “to come in whatever they want to come in.” An organizer who identified as trans went topless during the cabaret event at one of the festivals. They argued going topless was powerful: “As the commander of the room . . . I use that power to set a precedent for what is okay and acceptable and as a way to encourage people in the space to explore.”

Festival organizers were aware of their responsibility for creating, as noted earlier, a culture of care. Adela (OUTstages) explained: “We [as organizers] have the responsibility that before our artists arrive, before our audience arrive, before we are inviting trans teenagers in Victoria, to create a safe space for them.” For Jenni (PWG), another organizer, upholding a culture of care involved seeing everyone as

my babies and I just want them to stay taken care of, and I don’t want something to happen to any of them. I also don’t want any of them doing something that makes somebody else uncomfortable, whether they realize it or not.

Upholding a culture of care for Jenni also included approaching festivalgoers who they had not seen before to welcome them and make small talk “to make them feel included.” This duty of care comes from a *queerternal* (i.e., a queer notion of maternal/paternal) perspective that involves protection through inclusion. Lucas (Rhubarb/OUTstages), an audience member, explained:

There was a lot of attentiveness from organizers. . . . It can be a bit scary coming to these events, especially for someone who is new to the community. . . . But there was something very warm about the festival with the organizers making their way around to many people [including me]. It made me feel very included and very welcomed. So, I felt safe and taken care of in a way.

A sexual flair. It would be remiss of me not to mention the sexual atmosphere of the festivals which contributed to the overall social and sex-positive atmosphere and culture of the festivals. The presence of free condoms, lube, and/or dental dams in the washrooms at Rhubarb and Pretty, Witty, and GAY!; the visuals and objects like the giant penis on a wall, tables collaged in nude photos, and the “junk book” (where festivalgoers could take images of their “junk”) at Pretty, Witty, and GAY!; and the choice by organizers to program performances with nudity or with themes about sex at all three festivals contributed to the atmosphere. As two organizers stated: “The giant 6-foot penis on the wall” (Jenni, PWG), “the fact that there’s naked people on the table you are sitting at . . . I feel it set a different vibe . . . [and] a different kind of social structure” (Kirra, PWG). A sex- and body-positive sentiment was also noted by festivalgoers:

There is a looseness at Rhubarb. . . It’s not an uptight space and it’s a lot less formal than I think some other theatre spaces are. . . . Like have you ever seen condoms in a bathroom

at other venues? I've seen people having sex in the bathroom at Rhubarb, which probably doesn't happen at a lot of theatres. (Kuan, Rhubarb)

Through the design and structural elements, organizers set the stage upon which the social life of the festivals unfolded (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992). The stage-managed spaces provided a set of social conditions or “rules of engagement” (Hammers, 2008, p. 567) that influenced the behaviour of festivalgoers. In other words, festival organizers provided a queer liminal performative space that provided festivalgoers with a refuge from the regimes of normative practices and performances codes (Igrek, 2018; Shields, 1990; V. Turner, 1982). However, it is important to recognize the agency that festivalgoers had over their actions in the festival space (Arching, 2010). As such, festivalgoers also directly influenced the culture and atmosphere of the social space. As Conlon (2004) indicated, social spaces do not exist merely of structures (i.e., a stage), but rather are “constituted through, productive of[,] and permeated with social relations” (p. 463). Thus, the performative queer festival spaces were co-constructed by festival organizers who provided an inclusive, safer, social, and experimental queer container and through the engagement of festivalgoers in the space (Lucas & Wright, 2013). In the next section, I discuss how festivalgoers influenced the culture and atmosphere of the festival.

Queer Embodiment: Performing Queer Bodies, Vulnerability, and Authentically

As scholars have argued, bodies and spaces simultaneously construct, (re)create,¹⁸ and influence one another (Bain & Nash, 2006; Hammers, 2008; Little & Leyshon, 2003; Nast & Pile, 1998). And this was absolutely true of these festivals. Specifically, participants indicated the festivals were spaces where they could be their vulnerable and authentic queer selves and experiment with their queer bodies.

¹⁸ Create and recreate.

Behaving vulnerably and authentic: The freedom to “just be” and to “let go.”

Several participants described the festivals as places they could be their queer vulnerably and authentic selves and just be or let go. Lucas (Rhubarb/OUTstages), for instance, stated “these theatre festivals help me to just be . . . like I don’t feel like I’ve got to hide [my queerness] from anybody.” In describing an emotional reaction to one of the cabaret performances, Kirra (PWG) stated, “I just let go. . . . I had tears streaming down my face, it was just beautiful. . . . I just felt this huge amount of letting go of the past and welcoming my new self.” Like Kirra, the majority of participants from each festival indicated how they felt free and safe to openly engage emotionally with the performances in ways they otherwise would not. As one festivalgoer articulated:

When the performer sang the song, “This is Me,” it really moved me. . . . I actually cried because I was really feeling sensitive in that moment. I’m not someone that cries in public. But I felt at ease, safe . . . confident, and good. (Sophia, PWG)

Other research participants who were audience members specifically mentioned or alluded to the notion of “feeling at home,” which allowed them to be more vulnerable and authentic. I will return to the discourse of feeling at home when discussing the second overarching theme.

Performers at all three festivals also spoke about how they felt the ability to be more vulnerable and authentic in their performances. Raúl (Rhubarb) stated:

Whether I like it or not, it’s a public coming out kind of thing when I perform. . . . And Rhubarb was interesting because it was like coming out to a primarily queer audience. So, it was less nerve-racking [than performing in nonqueer spaces] . . . and I did feel like I was feeling more myself, so I was more effeminate because . . . I felt like there was less judgment.

Daunte (Rhubarb), another performer, shared a similar sentiment but highlighted how he conceals his sexuality in other spaces, such as at his work: “I am always keeping a lid on my sexuality. But at Rhubarb there was no anxiety, and I could really be myself . . . I felt this in my performance as well.”

That Raúl, Daunte, and other participants behaved differently in nonqueer-specific spaces suggests a splintering of performative roles. At the queer theatre festivals, participants embodied their authentic queerness; whereas in other spaces—like at work for Daunte or nonqueer performance spaces for Raúl—participants were not completely comfortable being their queer selves. In fact, both Raúl and Daunte alluded to acting “straighter” in nondominant queer spaces, which suggest policing of heterosexual norms/behaviour causes them to act differently in such spaces—a policing that does not exist or is at least minimized at these queer theatre festivals. The difference between how one performs at the festival compared to their performance in other public spaces aligns with Goffman’s (1959) view of a public frontstage performance versus a private backstage performance. Goffman was, of course, speaking many decades ago, but often things are still the same today. Therefore, the importance of having festivals that provide a freedom to just be and to let go—an expression of agency—is an authentic expression/performance that challenges the social construction of gender and sexuality norms and should never be underestimated (Brickell, 2005; Butler, 1990).

Building on the authenticity of performers, some spoke of how the festivals provided them with the freedom to reveal personal details to the extent they did not allow family members to attend their show. As Theo (Rhubarb) explained: “I put a lot of personal shit into [my show]. And my parents were like, ‘Should we come see it?’ And I was like, ‘No you shouldn’t.’ Because at one point, I directly call out my dad.” Yet for performers like Nina (OUTstages),

inviting family members was a way to communicate personal stories and views they were reluctant to talk about in a conventional format.

A playful experimental space: Performances in performances. Building on the above discussion, the festival spaces also provided an opportunity for festivalgoers to engage in playful experimentation. From my own journal:

It was the third day of the Rhubarb festival and I was wandering up and down Church Street sightseeing before the first show of the day. Over the previous 2 days, I had observed how many festivalgoers seemed quite queer in their appearance—some of this probably had to do with my own stereotypes of what a queer body looks like. But the open and exploratory festival atmosphere shook something in me, and I had an urge to repierce my nose. I felt I could really be my queer self in this space and didn't have to conform, as I have felt in other spaces. I had pierced my nose before while I was on a long sabbatical from my government job. However, I felt it was necessary to remove it when I returned to my heteronormative and conservative work environment. . . . During the OUTstages festival, I also wore heels to one of the performances, and in prior years, I have worn more outrageous gender-bending outfits [as discussed mentioned in the Front of House Speech]. . . . These acts were my own little queer performance in a way.

What I am saying in this journal entry, and was expressed by other participants, is festival spaces provided us with a sense of agency to put on a public display of our queer bodies. Though most festivalgoers wore relaxed clothing, it was evident some, including me, took the festival as an opportunity to dress in excess or in full drag, wear outrageous or skimpy outfits such as mesh see-through tops on bodies with breasts; leather gear; short shorts; tight, or revealing clothing; and to accessorize with heels, costume jewelry, and wigs. Thea (Rhubarb) articulated: "I know it

may be a controversial phrase, but I feel like at Rhubarb you can just let your ‘freak flag fly.’ You can just be who you are . . . dressed in all sorts of different ways and feel safe” doing so. She went on to note it is about “celebrating multiplicity . . . through the artful decorating of self. And why shouldn’t we go way beyond what we as adults are often told or encouraged how to behave?”

Scholarship on other festivals have also found festivals encourage festivalgoers to be creative and to experiment with their identity (e.g., Bennet & Woodward, 2014; Johnston, 2005; Lundberg, 2007). Experimenting with identity is a sense of agency, a “lifting and shifting of bodily boundaries and identities” (Hammers, 2008, p. 568). This agency was particularly evident during the cabarets, the two kick-off party events at Rhubarb, and the Panty Raid event at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! During a special one-night performance at Rhubarb, *Pearle Harbour’s Battle Cry*, I spoke to three self-identified gay men who had dressed in drag. For them, it was something they did each year as a group because they felt it was a “safe” and “playful” space. In talking about the festival as an opportunity to experiment, an organizer of Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, noted “we have a new drag queen born almost every year.” Blair (PWG), who disrobed during one of the events, spoke to the safe and playful space as being so different because “I would have never taken off my shirt and danced around like a hooligan elsewhere.” A festival organizer explained the how the festival afforded festivalgoers an opportunity to be creative and to experiment with their identity from the perspective of trans individuals:

It really is giving them the opportunity to go and have that experience . . . Like they’ll get all done up, like in a nice dress . . . or a nice bow tie, and then they’ll parade around and be really cool and confident.

This queering of bodies suggests festivals are not only safer spaces but also that productive bodies can create performative spaces that “contest the very reifications of gender[, sexuality,] and identity” (Butler, 1990, p. 5) without punishment (see also Conlon, 2004). The performance of alternative identities challenged normative assumptions and ideologies of heterosexuality (Markwell & Waitt, 2009). Further, these acts were examples of “embodied resistances to the culturally dominant mainstream” (Kates & Belk, 2001, p. 411) and had political significations, as I will discuss in Act Five.

I conclude this section with a found poem that illustrates how the inclusive, social, safe, and experimental culture and atmosphere of the festivals impacted festivalgoers and performers. Words in italics are my own.

***A curated space for me* (Kuan, Rhubarb)**

The organizers have created a safe container (Jamie, Rhubarb)

I want people to feel well taken care of and feel like they are safe and respected
I want you to be in a safe space because I want the art to push you (Ben, OUTstages)

I felt pushed in many ways . . .

To be sexy (Deion, PWG)
To queer my body (Jenni, PWG)
To wear heels (festival organizer)
To dress in drag (Francesco, PWG)
To fuck with gender (René, Rhubarb)
To be open about my body and be body positive (Jenni, PWG)
To dance in my underwear and take shots of my junk (Kirra, PWG)
To laugh, cry, cheer (Hayden, PWG)
To be vulnerable (Ziqi, OUTstages)

“Come as you are!”
This is our safe haven (Jon, Rhubarb)

It is a space . . . for us as a community, and a place where people feel . . . open and safe to express their authentic self
It is quite powerful . . . (Akito, Rhubarb)

Safe spaces are so important . . . to share ideas, to have a voice (Adela, OUTstages)

A safe place for sharing and vulnerability, and intimacy to just like be (Dakoda, OUTstages)

Just being in a . . . setting . . . that gives you permission to . . . react authentically (Oliver, OUTstages)

The warm welcome . . . and space
 Gave me the confidence. . .
 Boosted my self-confidence. . .
 My self-esteem. . .
 to be who I am (Francesco, PWG)

You know this is me. . . This is who I am meant to be
 I felt confident and accepted
 to be just be my . . . queer . . . self (Sophia, PWG)

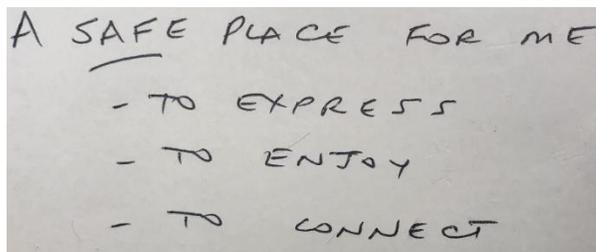
There is less pressure to conform (Jamar, PWG)

I was able to perform . . . more authentically
 I wasn't worried about being judged for being Trans (Andi, OUTstages)

Being able to self-determine, self-identify, to self-express our authentic selves
 I felt that I was seen and loved
 It was like unleashing one's voice
 I'm going back to [my home community] with such a full heart (Keegan, Rhubarb)

It is safe and . . . inviting to . . . folks who may not be a part of the dominant paradigm
 (Naveen, Rhubarb)
 For people like me
 a queer person of colour (Dakoda, OUTstages)

Not safe in that you won't be challenged or won't think about complex things (Aharon, Rhubarb)
 It is warm and safely unpredictable (Jon, Rhubarb)



(Postcard, Rhubarb)

to experiment (Lily, Rhubarb)
 to explore (Lily, Rhubarb)

your sexuality (Dakoda, OUTstages)
 your identity (Kirra, PWG)
 queer issues (Lily, Rhubarb)

A place that's accepting of everybody (Hayden, PWG)

to explore the intersection of . . .

queerness and capitalism (Keegan, Rhubarb)
 queer women of colour and trans people of colour (Kanesha, OUTstages),
 being queer and Indigenous (Nina, OUTstages)
 and between being queer and religious (Emmett, PWG)

I felt safe to . . .

be more vocal (Jesse, Rhubarb)
 to question things (Jamar, PWG)
 to ask questions (Thea, Rhubarb)
 to cry visibly (Sophia, PWG)
 to share something more personal (Andi, OUTstages)
 to allow emotions, stories, feelings, thoughts, history to move through the
 physical body (Niimi, Rhubarb)

I feel safe [at Pretty, Witty, and GAY!] (Nina, PWG)

I feel safe at OUTstages (Andi, OUTstages)

I feel safe at Rhubarb

As a queer Indigenous person

I don't really know where else I feel safe right now (Niimi, Rhubarb)¹⁹

A Queer Liminal Home: Fostering A Sense of Communitas, Solidarity, and Belonging

As a result of the queer festival atmosphere and culture cocreated by festival organizers and festivalgoers, a major outcome of the festivals was that they helped establish a greater sense of a queer community, solidarity, and belonging in the cities in which they operate. This benefit was noted by all interview participants and by many who completed the postcard survey (see Figure 8). Scholars have noted the significance of other queer festivals and cultural events in creating a greater sense of community and collective identity (e.g., Binnie & Klesse, 2018; Browne, 2008; J. Gamson, 1996; Juris, 2014; Rich, Clarke, Fung, White, 1999). A sense of

¹⁹ The not guilty verdicts in the trials for the murders of Colten Boushie and Tina Fontaine occurred leading up to, and during, the Rhubarb festival, respectively.

community (or belonging) is a fundamental human motivation necessary for individuals to achieve a sense of psychological well-being and to achieve self-actualization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). A sense of community has also been associated with positive impacts on mental health (McLaren, Jude, & McLachlan, 2007; Wilkens, 2015), emotional well-being, quality of life, a respite from loneliness (Wilkens, 2015), higher levels of self-esteem (Hahm, Ro, & Olson, 2018), and greater self-worth (Fernandez, 2006). Furthermore, the establishment of a sense of queer community is significant for increasing social capital in communities (Gould, 2001; Pooley, Cohen, & Pike, 2005).

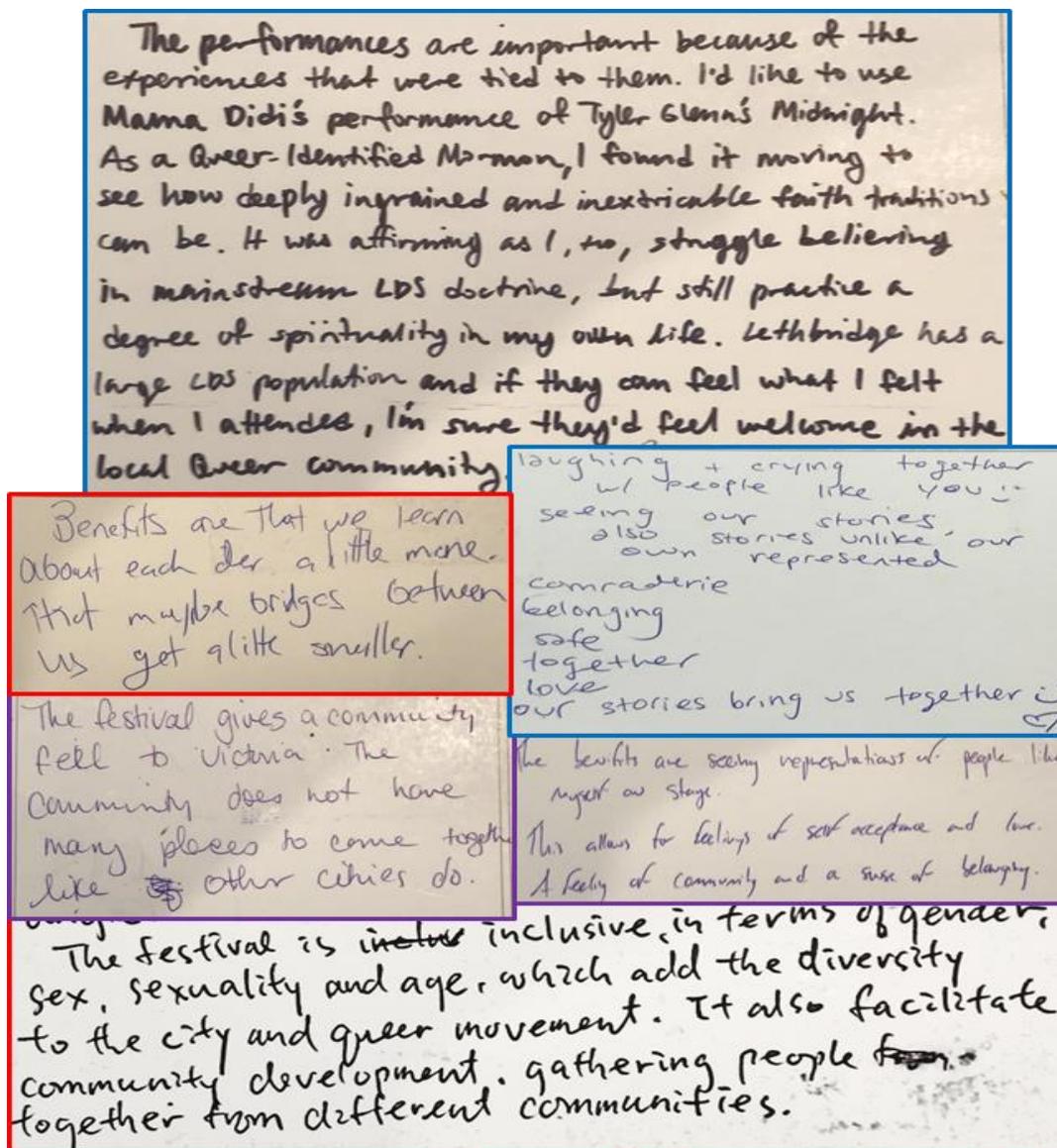


Figure 8. Examples of postcard surveys alluding to the notion of community. Coloured boxes correspond to the festival: red (Rhubarb), blue (PWG), and purple (OUTstages).

For some participants, it was simply being surrounded by other queers and being in a queer space that provided them with a sense of community. For others, it was because of the relationships they formed (e.g., friendships, mentorships, and intimate relationships) while being at the festival. In fact, several participants indicated they attend the festivals regularly as a way to reconnect with old friends or to make new ones. For example, Jose (Rhubarb) indicated, “my

participation in the queer community has almost been entirely through theatre; it's my main connection to the queer community and how I meet queer people."

Many participants spoke to the sense of community being developed at the festivals through the metaphors of a figurative home, second home, family, or chosen family for queers. These metaphors are a challenge to the typical definition of family and home based on biology. The following poem illustrates the sense of family and home the festivals provided participants with (emphasis added).

It's family. . . . We are at home (Nina, OUTstages)

You feel as if you're at home (Blair, PWG)
It is a second home space for me (Kuan, Rhubarb)

I'm hanging out with my queer community
My queer family
My chosen family (Tobby, OUTstages)

YOU

Build this little family that you see over and over for five days
A festival family (Ben, OUTstages)

At my first Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival it was like I was . . . welcoming this brand-new family into my life (Kirra, PWG)

It's a place [where] I feel comfortable and at home (Amelia, Rhubarb)

The festival and the theatre are actually building a community here
We call it our Didi Family (Liam, Lethbridge)
A queer chosen family (Tyee, OUTstages)

In addition to just like the WOW factor
the emotional stuff
there is also the sense of community and family (Darius, PWG)

I felt included right away because I felt as if I was at home (Kanesha, OUTstages)

It is truly a feeling of being at home (Jose, Rhubarb)
[For] this is my home (Thea, Rhubarb)

It feels like a **Big Warm Hug** (Ella, PWG).

In what follows, I discuss the myriad of ways in which a sense of community emerged at all three festivals.

Forming Connections Beyond Traditional Queer Spaces

Many participants indicated there exists a lack of opportunities for queer people to connect and indicated theatre festivals were fulfilling a need for different spaces for them and their allies to interact, particularly outside traditional bars and clubs. This was particularly true for participants in smaller cities like Victoria and Lethbridge where there existed fewer queer events and establishments and where equally importantly, “the community can seem really hidden because queer people don’t have many places to go to like they do in Toronto. So, the festival really is building a community” (Liam, PWG). Yet, despite there being more spaces in Toronto for queers to find community, a few participants from Rhubarb spoke of the importance of the festival in helping to establish a queer community, given many gay²⁰ clubs and bars were closing.

The festivals were also important for establishing a sense of community for underage queers who could not access queer bars and nightclubs and for older participants who felt they do not belong in such spaces. For example, Andi (OUTstages), who was not of legal drinking age, indicated “outside of the gay club, there are not many queer spaces where I can go and hang out and meet other queer people.” Theatre festivals are also important for older lesbians, such as Kylie (OUTstages), who spoke of how the festival gave her an “opportunity to meet lots of people and feel connected, otherwise I would have to drag myself to the nightclub and that space isn’t a place for . . . an old dyke.” She noted that while much of queer history is indebted to queer bars and clubs, such spaces are not necessarily accessible to all. Scholars have also found the

²⁰ I refer to bars as “gay” rather than queer because this is how participants referred to them and because they often lack a queer intersectional clientele.

typical queer bar and nightclub goer is middle class, White, under 35, slender, body toned, well dressed, and well groomed (Holt & Griffin, 2003; J. Taylor, 2008).

The extent of diversity of the attendees at the theatre festivals compared to queer bars and nightclubs was particularly important in creating a greater sense of queer community. For Max, Rhubarb was “open to all shapes, forms, weight, and colours of queers . . . and to those who aren’t into the party scene. I don’t fit in with the club scene and it isn’t a place where I find community.” Several participants, including Max, spoke to how unwelcome they felt in some queer spaces. Feeling uncomfortable in some queer spaces was particularly true of participants who identified as trans, bisexual, and people of colour. For example, Akito (Rhubarb), a person of colour, explained:

As a bi-identifying person in the community, I do think a lot about the limits of the community and when you are welcome in that space and when you are not. In other spaces, bisexuals . . . trans people, or people of colour even are often ignored and so one thing I think about is who is being used as a pawn in this political organizing. . . . But at Rhubarb, I did feel like it was a queer community gathering place, that it was a very inclusive space, and I felt very comfortable.

Authenticity: Identity, Emotions, and Shared Experiences

As I previously discussed, many participants indicated they felt they were able to be their authentic queer selves at the festivals. Feeling like you are able to be your queer self—in other words, feeling authentic—and feeling a true sense of collective belonging are fundamental for queer well-being and are mutually reinforcing (Browne, 2017; Holt & Griffin, 2003; Riggle, 2017; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). As Brown argued, “true belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are (p. 40).” In

discussing their sense of belonging that the theatre festivals afforded them, many participants alluded to authenticity.

The ability for festivalgoers to express their authentic sexual and gender identities was significant for establishing a sense of community. For instance, several participants spoke about not having to “come out” (or “come home,” as three younger participants stated) while at the theatre festivals. This was important to them in creating a greater sense of belonging because they did not have to fear people’s reaction to them being queer. As a result, participants felt they were able to form more meaningful connections as articulated by Raúl (Rhubarb):

You are constantly meeting new people . . . [and] new audiences and it’s kind of a given that you’re queer in a way [or that you are surrounded by people who are accepting of queers] when you’re in it [i.e., the festival]. So, it’s great because you don’t have to go through that barrier. . . . You can then meet people on a different level; a deeper level because you are past the queer coming out hurdle and it is more relaxed because of that.

The different and deeper level Raúl referred to was in terms of connecting with others in regard to the sharing of personal stories and emotions, possibly because he did not need to hide his queer identity or feel the need to “come out [once] again.” Throughout our lives, us queers must continue to come out. In doing so, we evaluate how safe it is in each new situation and space we encounter, which is often a cause of much stress (Meyer, 2013).

The ability to express authentic emotions and develop empathy was also expressed by participants as factors contributing to a sense of community, just as McMillan and Chavis (1986) argued. The following dialogue describes a personal experience of mine at Rhubarb:

As the audience stood to give a standing ovation for the *White Girls in Moccasins* performance, I noticed a fellow festivalgoer standing beside me crying. And I too was

feeling emotional. As others began to exit the theatre, the person beside me sat back down. Rather than exiting and forcing them to stand up so I could exit the row we were sitting in, I just sat there. Together, we shared this moment and held space for one another. After a few minutes, they looked at me and thanked me for sitting with them. Wiping tears away, they went on to share their personal story with me and why there were so impacted by the performance. Before even speaking to me, the effects of their oppression were on display throughout their bodily expressions. . . . I formed a deep empathetic connection with them. . . . It was clear this person felt safe in this space to visibly express their sincere emotions.

This experience opened my eyes to the emotional and empathetic reactions of festivalgoers and the power these reactions had in creating a sense of connectedness. Jamie (Rhubarb) noted:

That show [*White Girls in Moccasins*] really impacted me and I was crying after it. . . . I was standing there after the show with a friend and two people came up to us [who I didn't know] and they're crying too and then we are all hugging each other. We were like connecting.

Though Jamie and others indicated that connections were formed by simply sharing emotional and empathetic reactions, others indicated how these reactions resulted in an intense desire to engage in conversation about the performances with others. These conversations further fostered a sense of connectedness. Raúl (Rhubarb) explained:

The Indigenous performances were very emotional. . . . We were all kind of breathing and emotional and wanted to talk about it . . . as we did, it opened my eyes to how much we can use this opportunity to be as a community, to . . . grieve together and to share our stories and understand each other.

As noted by Schertz (2007), “empathy can be seen as a form of communication by which human beings interact” (p. 8). For several participants, the desire to engage in conversation stood in contrast to other theatre performances. Quinn (PWG) explained: “It’s not like seeing *Wicked* where you don’t . . . think about the themes or the hidden message in it . . . people really want to talk about the themes and have discussions about the performances.”

Many festivalgoers who saw their friends perform indicated how they felt a greater connection to them as a result. This feeling was largely because they learned something very personal about their friend and connected with them on a deeper emotional and empathetic level. Medika (Rhubarb) stated: “In witnessing my best friend go through such an important spiritual journey of reclaiming her past that she had pushed away connected me on even a deeper level with [them].” Though Medika was previously aware of her friend’s past, hearing and seeing the story performed allowed her to better understand her friend’s struggles. Similarly, Jamar (PWG) discussed how he became more connected to a friend who shared the impact of a religious upbringing:

I knew he had been raised in a Mormon household, but I hadn’t really thought about the effects of that and how it still lingers in him as an adult. So, his performance really shed light on that and connected me emotionally on a deeper personal level with him, which is what is so powerful about the festival in general.

In articulating the sense of community formed at the theatre festivals as a result of being authentic, a few participants compared the theatre festivals to other queer spaces. Nina (PWG), for example, argued “the gay club provides fake connection[s].” Kirra (PWG) spoke about the intense pressure in clubs “to conform.” Though queer bars and nightclubs can be liberating and authentic spaces for some, the lack of diversity and a policing of behaviour and appearance that

occurs in such spaces makes them feel like inauthentic spaces to others (Eichenberger, 2012; Holt & Griffin, 2003; J. Taylor, 2008). When queer people feel safe and in an authentic space, they are not only more likely to express their gender identities, sexual orientations, but also share their true emotions and important aspects of their lives with others (Cunningham, Pickett, Melton, Lee, & Miner, 2014; Meyer, 2013).

The Performances: Seeing Yourself on Stage and Breaking the Fourth Wall

Participants also felt a sense of belonging through the themes of the performances and their connections to the stories told by performers. For instance, Tanisha (Rhubarb) felt, it's always so inspirational to see your own story . . . represented on stage. . . . It's just like, "Oh, yeah, I see myself in there," and I think that it gives you the feeling that you are part of the community. . . . You feel like you belong, and it's really powerful to be around a lot of people . . . who have had the same experiences as you, and who understand you on that level.

For Tanisha and other participants, seeing others on stage who have had similar life experiences resulted in personal relatedness, which is an essential factor in feeling a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The aforementioned breaking of the fourth wall also served to facilitate community building at the festivals. Many performances broke the fourth wall by speaking directly to the audience, by using audience participation (e.g., having the audience take on roles or simply having them sing or clap along to a song), by becoming audience members themselves during the performance, and/or by pausing for an applause or reaction mid performance. As a result of this breakdown, there was also a unique symbiotic relationship formed during the performances. At

times, both the audience and the performers held space for one another and created a container without the traditional fourth wall. As one artist described it:

The audience is holding that energy and the space for us. . . . We are pointing a very specific finger and asking very direct questions to the audience and they are also asking themselves questions and are questioning things. . . . Our performance ends with an invitation where the lines between you [the audience] and us [the performers] are blurred.

(Medika, Rhubarb)

Engaging Across Communities: Bridging Intersections of Queer Communities

Several participants in my study alluded to the metaphor of a bridge to describe how the queer theatre festivals fostered a sense of community across queer communities. A bridge is a powerful metaphor. Bridges are structures that provide a means of connection. The phrase “bridge the gap,” as two participants stated, means “to have qualities of two different groups or things” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Thus, both bonding and bridging social capital, as described by Putnam (2000), was established at the festivals. “The Festival is a Bridge” is a found poem I compiled to illustrate the complexity and importance of this bridging. Again, words in italics are my own.

“The Festival is a Bridge” (Sophia, PWG)

I am not yet sure of my sexual orientation
The festival provides a connection between the new—*the questioning*
and the existing community
Even those of us who are not yet out (Sophia, PWG)

It is building that bridge between the queer community[ies] with allies and the larger community
(Hayden, PWG)

Our stories bring us together (postcard survey)

The festival is bringing different communities together
to meet

to bridge gaps (Adela, OUTstages)

We often surround ourselves with those people who are similar to us
 The festival helps you bridge the gap with the Others
 Like queer women, biwomen, people of colour, trans, [and] Indigenous people
 [The festival] serves a very important purpose in creating bonds (Bae, Rhubarb)

The festival is multigenerational
 Multiracial
 Multi-ability
 Multigender
 Multi-orientation
 Multi—EVERYTHING (Thea, Rhubarb)

[This] diversity facilitates queer community development (postcard survey)

Bridges are being formed
 between different queer communities (Niki, Rhubarb)

Afterall
 WE
 are all in this together (Liam, PWG; Nina, OUTstages; Niimi, Rhubarb)

Establishing this bridge had much to do with the fact organizers had programmed shows from a cross section of the queer community and sought to ensure voices were being heard from as many intersections of the queer community as possible. As one organizer stated, “if you bring in arts from a community, that community will come to it. . . . Diversity is a huge consideration, and it attracts different audiences that also cross-pollinate” (Amelia, Rhubarb). Rich (2006) has also argued that “efforts in programming do sometimes pay off with diversified audiences” (p. 622).

Building Connections with Like-Minded Organizations

The organizations that ran the three queer theatre festivals did not operate in silos. In fact, all three organizations partnered and worked with other organizations, including sponsors, and other queer community groups. For instance, all three organizations had established relationships with their local Pride festival organizations. Partnerships had also been formed between queer

theatre festival organizers and other queer community organizations. Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, for instance, worked closely with ARCHES (a nonprofit society that works to responds to and reduces harm associated with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C in Southwestern Alberta), and OUTstages formed a partnership with the Crush Collective (an organization that puts on club nights in Victoria for the queer community and its allies) to offer free tickets to LGBT youth. Festival organizers also worked with other queer community groups and leaders to program specific performances and events. For example, Rhubarb worked with several artists who were deaf and hard of hearing to produce the performance *Deaf That!*, and OUTstages worked with leaders of the Trans Tipping Point (a trans youth-led arts and writing initiative) to produce the youth cabaret.

Though connections with community groups and organizations existed, festival leaders recognized their limitations to successfully implement projects such as the *Deaf That!* performance at Rhubarb or the youth cabaret at OUTstages. For one festival organizer from OUTstages, the challenge was: “We don’t have the connections with the youth community and we really wanted to reach the youth and the youth trans community because those are really powerful stories, and often they’re not given time and space.” However, in response to this deficiency: “We went out searching for someone who could take this on, and we partnered with [leaders] of the Trans Tipping Point.” The importance of these bridges is they provided access to more intersectional resources and queer social networks (Diani & Bison, 2004; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004).

Several festival organizers indicated the local social networks they have developed with other queer cultural organizations and local businesses made their festivals more successful and fostered a greater sense of community between the organizations:

I think the biggest shift I've seen in Pretty, Witty, And GAY! over the years I've been involved in it is a shift from just being theatre people to being people from Lethbridge [who attend the festival] and so the festival has grown. . . . And part of that is because we work closely with ARCHES, Pride, and a lot of different organizations here in the community. (Hayden, PWG)

To Jamar (PWG), the connections formed by the different organizations enhanced the diversity of the festival by bringing different queer community groups together. As a result of the coming together of the various groups, he believed it made the community feel smaller because it made the organizations and the people involved in those organizations feel less isolated. Overall, these partnerships and formal and informal social networks with like-minded queer organizations contribute to coalition building, local queer community development, social capital, and to the success of the queer social movement (Jeannotte, 2003; Meyer & Whittier, 1994).

Finding Lovers and “Picking Up”

A few participants also spoke of the sense of community being created at the festival as a result of the intimate/romantic relationships they formed. Though not nearly as evident compared to other queer spaces such as clubs, the festivals are spaces where festivalgoers find lovers and sexual partners. A participant at Rhubarb indicated how they found their first partner at the festival. Thea (Rhubarb) stated, “the festival is a place where you can develop crushes and relationships . . . and that is also part of forming a community for me.” Koen (Rhubarb) shared a similar sentiment but noted the difference between picking up at Rhubarb compared to a club: “You get to have real conversations and make deeper connections with people rather than just sucking face and going home together.” I also developed intimate relationships at past festivals. Such relationships help affirm queer identity and contribute to an individual's network of people

who are aware of the person's identity and are available to provide social support (D'Augelli, 1994). As a result, these relationships can provide individuals with a sense of belonging.

Building a Community of Artists

Compared to one-off performances, the theatre festivals were unique because they brought together a number of artists who also saw shows and interacted with the audience and other performers. All but three performers I interviewed indicated they also attended shows as audience members, which is unique compared to typical performances whereby there is little opportunity for audience members to interact with artists. In fact, the majority of performers indicated they solicited feedback from the audience. A significant benefit discussed by the majority of artists I interviewed was how the festivals gave them the opportunity to meet each other and other artistic leaders—fostering a “community of artists,” as Ben (OUTstages) stated. Ben went on to explain:

The festival fosters a community of queer artists by connecting local artists with national colleagues. It is really exposing them to queer theatre work that is happening across the country. When you put all these artists in the same space, what happens is that they get to meet one another, begin to collaborate, and they can learn best practices from each other.

This wouldn't happen outside of a festival. Artists are really coming together for the week or so and making lasting connections and engaging in their art together.

Though this community is formed naturally as a result of the festival framework, festival organizers did play a significant role. Adela (OUTstages), for instance, indicated “there are a lot of industry events that go on at festivals that allow you to meet artists, presenters, administrators, and even audience members where you can share ideas and perfect your craft together.” Both Rhubarb and OUTstages held several events to connect artists. Specifically, OUTstages had an

opening and closing reception for artists. At the end of each week at Rhubarb, there was a “community meal where artists of that week get together and connect” (Raúl, Rhubarb). In addition, Rhubarb held two workshops where artists connected to discuss best practices for financing their art and how to best represent and integrate stories about mental health in a performance.

Although the opportunity to connect with artists and artistic leaders was important for all artists, it was especially important for emerging artists, as several performers indicated:²¹

I don’t get a chance to meet many artists, especially young ones, trans artists, and artists of colour. But the festival exposes me to these artist (Peter, Rhubarb). With a festival, there are more opportunities to socialize and hang out with other artists, which is nice for someone like me who is a relatively new performer (Raúl, Rhubarb). I have met some wonderful people through Rhubarb, and a lot of the artists that have come into my life and that I have collaborated with are because of it (Theo, Rhubarb). It was because of OUTstages last year, where I met . . . [the current artist] who I am working with on a new project. (Tobby, OUTstages)

The cabarets at all three festivals were particularly useful for connecting emerging artists. As one performer at the Pretty, Witty, and GAY! cabaret stated:

I watched other drag queens who were also in the cabaret and I observed their genre, style . . . performance techniques . . . fashion, and make-up. I find myself learning from them while I watch them perform. . . . There were also two drag queens who are like my idols . . . and now we are going to get together to talk about doing drag. (Deion, PWG)

²¹ As indicated in Act Three, I combine quotes from different participants as a creative way to represent related stories, experiences, or opinions expressed by participants. This was one of the ways in which I queered this study.

A drag artist who performed at OUTstages also indicated it was the festival that connected them to other drag artists. They went on to say, “there are about four of us who have performed over the years at OUTstages and we now get together regularly to practice, and we also perform group numbers together on occasion.” Forming connections with other artists, attending workshops and other social events, and in seeing shows themselves provided artists with opportunities for collective learning. I explore this further in the next scene and discuss the queer discourse and learning that occurred at the theatre festivals.

ACT FOUR SCENE TWO: FESTIVALS AS PEDAGOGICAL SPACES

In the previous act, I discussed how queer theatre festivals were queer inclusive, safe, social, and experimental spaces that provided a sense of community. The spaces allowed festivalgoers to escape the outside heterosexual world and to behave with “abandonment and freedom” (Pielichaty, 2015, p. 235). Liminal (betwixt and between) spaces, such as festivals, have been found to “provide ~~men~~ [festivalgoers] with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassification of reality . . . [that] incite ~~men~~ [festivalgoers] to *action* as well as to *thought*” (V. Turner, 1969, pp. 128–129, emphasis added). As Bhabha (as cited in Rutherford, 1990) argued, such liminal spaces, or “third spaces” as Bhabha referred to them, are cultural spaces “of negotiation of meaning and representation” that “enable other positions to emerge” (p. 211; see also Bhabha, 2004). Indeed, the queer theatre festivals, like other festivals (see Andersen, 2012; Coval, 2010; Li, Moor, & Smythe, 2017; C. Roy, 2016), were found to be pedagogical spaces—spaces of deep thought, meaning making, and negotiation.

A review of the mission and mandates of the organizations running the festivals revealed that while there is a focus on entertainment, they also emphasize objectives related to education and social justice. For instance, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (n.d.-a) stated “we believe theatre plays a vital role in the educational, social, and economic health of a community” (para. 6); in their mandate, Theatre Outré (n.d.) indicated the “season is selected to entertain, enlighten, challenge and provoke” (para. 6); and “to educate” (Intrepid Theatre, n.d.-b, para. 7) is stated in Intrepid Theatre’s mandate. In what follows, I present the findings related to the festivals as pedagogical sites. I begin with a discussion on the content learned, followed by an overview of the ways in which learning occurred. Interwoven in the discussions on what was learned and how

learning occurred are the impacts and outcomes of the learning, which I discuss in more detail in the final section of this act.

What was Learned From Their Participation?

And we learned . . .

[We] laughed out loud (Sam, Rhubarb)
 We danced (Kirra, PWG)
 [We] sang along (Kylie, OUTstages)
 We cried together (Ann Bernice, OUTstages)
 We were playful (Thea, Rhubarb)
 We had fun (Ella, PWG)

We [also] learned (Adela, OUTstages)
 It is like a school
 There is just so much learning (Jose, Rhubarb)

The theatre festivals were effective at opening up new spaces for discourse and listening by providing opportunities for high-risk storytelling (Butterwick & Selman, 2003). In adult education, storytelling—especially through examples of lived realities—is effective for learning (Bird, 2007; Goldbard, 2006; Razack, 1993). Bird (2007) stated, “storytelling functions as a sensemaking device, and individual, social, and group identities derive from telling stories” (p. 317). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) added, “the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves” (p. 64). Though the majority of festivalgoers who participated in this study indicated they primarily attended the queer theatre festivals for the entertainment and social benefits the festivals provided, they also indicated there were significant opportunities for incidental learning. Learning largely occurred from performances “bring[ing] attention to issues not currently addressed within mainstream views of society” (postcard survey, OUTstages) and of topics absent from past, and even many current, formal education curricula (Rupp & Freeman, 2017; Short, 2014). In terms of educational content, the festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to learn about various facets of queer culture and theatre and performance.

Queer Cultural Learning

The performances at the festivals generated much queer discourse that resulted in queer cultural learning. I use the phrase *queer cultural learning* to describe learning about queer histories, sexuality, gender identity and expression, queer sex, verbal and nonverbal queer language, queer visual and physical codes, queer practices such as drag, current and ongoing queer issues, and queer intersectionalities. Embedded in this phrase are queer values, beliefs, and behavioural norms. Though we speak of a queer community, there are many subcommunities, and the festivals “help in terms of learning about different cultures and communities within the queer community” (Sophia, PWG). The majority of the performances directly or indirectly raised awareness of and promoted queer culture, and in some cases challenged hegemonic cultural norms that have and are influencing queer culture. Though learning about queer culture was multifaceted and included all of the aforementioned facets, the focus of the following discussion is on the dominant areas of queer cultural learning at the festivals.

Queer histories/herstories/theirstories. Many of the performances provided insight into queer lives by exploring past personal stories (with topics such as bullying, sexual assault, racism, and coming out) or by addressing historical events that have shaped and impacted the queer social movement and queer culture. For example, the performance *Motherload* at Rhubarb explored queer life in the past through the relationship between two senior-aged queers and their mothers and their experiences coming out to them. Akito (Rhubarb) explained the importance of this performance:

There is a lot of cultural amnesia in the queer community. I think we give more attention to younger voices. It is important to think about and learn from the people who were at the front lines of important battles for our rights. *Motherload* stood out in that regard and

it was pretty significant to have these older men in drag in the space. . . . It is an opportunity for younger people like me to learn from them; to learn how far the movement has come. . . . There are not many opportunities for us to learn these things [and] I think it is important we do not forget them.

The performance, *The Confession of Jeffrey Dahmer*, at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! also provided an overview of a historical event that significantly impacted the queer community. In fact, the majority of people I interviewed at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! who saw the performance were not previously aware Jeffrey Dahmer was gay or he had targeted gay men. *My Funny Valentine* at OUTstages provided a historical account of the tragic murder of Laurence King—a 15-year-old gay student in Oxnard, California—who was shot for asking a fellow student to be his valentine. Other participants at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! and OUTstages echoed Akito's sentiments of the importance of such performances.

Performances exploring queer history serve to honour the lives of queer people and provide significant learning opportunities. As Akito (Rhubarb) and others acknowledged, there exists widespread queer cultural amnesia, which Shepard (2015) has also discussed. However, the theatre festivals were mitigating this amnesia by opening up spaces for queer histories to be heard and shared. The festivals, much like social movements in general, are central to the construction of collective memories (Kubal & Becerra, 2014). As much as we may wish to forget our histories of struggle, learning about and remembering our history prevents queer erasure. As Kundera (1979) has argued:

The first step in liquidating a people . . . is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture,

invent a new history. Before long that nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster. (p. 159)

In addition to preventing queer erasure, collective memories of queer culture and past acts of resistance provide interpretive frameworks for understanding the present and serve as important resources (i.e., lessons from the past) present-day queers and activists can draw and build upon in their own struggles (Kinsman, 2010; Kubal & Becerra, 2014). A deficiency of historical queer knowledge can result in feelings of hopelessness and complacency when new challenges arise (Rupp & Freeman, 2017).

Being aware of and learning about queer historical events also contributes to the development of queer cultural capital, and specifically, queer familial capital (Pennell, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Such knowledge, especially by younger queers, helps to bridge the gap between queer generations by fostering social bonds between them. As Razack (1993) indicated, the sharing of stories allows us “to reach each other across differences” (p. 56). Rhubarb participant Keegan acknowledged the growing divide and lack of unity between older and younger queers; something other researchers have also found (Cash, 2019; Russell & Bohan, 2005). Keegan stated:

My [younger] generation is often critical of the older generation for not doing enough and for being stuck in the past . . . Hearing the stories from them allowed me to learn about how things were in the past and the world they came out in . . . It gave me a better appreciation and understanding and made me realize we are all really fighting for the same thing.

Ultimately, it caused Keegan to “have more empathy for older queers.” When we better understand the experiences of the “other,” including the experiences of different queer

generations, and can emotionally connect with them, as Keegan indicated, we not only achieve a greater sense of unity, but we can also better address the needs of queers (Bohan, Russell, & Montgomery, 2003).

Learning about gender and sexual identity, labels, and fluidity. Many participants indicated they learned a lot about gender and sexual identity, labels, and fluidity, particularly in regard to trans, two- and six-spirit identities,²² and other sexualities beyond gay, lesbian, and bisexual. This learning is not surprising given the attention to these topics at the festivals and the fact they are not discussed at great lengths in the mainstream. Reflecting upon the performance *Animal Medicine*, OUTstages participant Billy indicated, “a lot of my trans education has come through the trans people that have performed at OUTstages.” Such learning increases understanding of others and helps bridge a gap between different queer communities. As Billy went on to say, “I feel more connected to trans and two-spirit people because the performances have given me a perspective I didn’t have . . . It is like I can talk their language because of it.” In terms of language, Billy was not only referring to learning the appropriate trans terms and labels, but also their emotional language as a result of gaining a deeper understanding of trans individuals’ personal experiences and identity. Like Billy, many straight-identified festivalgoers I interviewed had a similar experience. For instance, Aimée indicated how OUTstages provided learning opportunities for her straight parents about nonbinary individuals and the use of pronouns. She stated:

It was an interesting pathway for them to understand some things. My mom didn’t quite understand how pronouns worked and what nonbinary meant. She has never had a

²² Two-spirit people are regarded as a third or fourth gender and some First Nations recognize up to six genders (The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, n.d.).

framework to understand it, but the festival and the stories told by performers gave her the pathway and helped her understand it.

The learning by straight people about queer culture and the various sexual and gender identities and labels is important and necessary for becoming and being a queer ally (Eichler, 2010), a topic I will further explore later in this act.

The use of labels to describe queer identity and sexuality is common in queer culture; however, such labels have changed considerably over time and are constantly evolving. Many participants—particularly older, and newly out or questioning queers—indicated how they learned about new identity labels and other queer terminology. Kylie (OUTstages) explained: “There [were] a lot of questions and ideas about the fluidity of sexuality and gender, which is all new to me and that I am getting to know It made me more aware of the different definitions” (Kylie, OUTstages). As Tyee (OUTstages) explained, “there is always going to be a new way that people like to be referred to and you can learn about this at the festival, and some of the ways you may have never heard of before.” Luna (OUTstages) shared a similar sentiment:

We are constantly deconstructing what were once radical ideas about gender and sexuality. As we are entering into a postmodern queer world, it is a whole new ballpark. I think some of the shows really showcased this idea of a pomosexual world we are entering and taught us about pomosexuality.

Someone who identifies as pomosexual²³ generally rejects labels, as pomosexuals do not fit in to the preestablished identity categories (i.e., LGBTQ+). Blair (PWG), who described herself as being new to the queer community, explained: “The festival has allowed me to learn that there isn’t just gay, bisexual, lesbian, or trans.” Learning about different sexualities and gender

²³ The term pomosexual was coined in the book *PoMoSexuals: Challenging Assumptions About Gender and Sexuality* edited by Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel in 1997.

identities is significant for identity development and for increasing understanding of people unlike ourselves, leading to increased interaction with—and positive and supportive attitudes toward—others (Ministry of Education, n.d.; UNESCO, 2018).

Learning about their own queer identities and fluidity. Learning about different gender identities and sexualities was also significant in terms of identity development. This learning was particularly true for participants questioning their gender identity and sexuality or who were newly out. For instance, Blair (PWG), who learned about new identity labels, also learned about her own identity. She went on to explain: “I’m starting to question my sexuality . . . The festival has opened my eyes to other possibilities . . . and I am starting to now see myself as pansexual.”²⁴ Being able to name our identity in an affirming environment is important in terms of identity development (D’Augelli, 1994). Specifically, the development of a person’s self-concept is pertinent for social and psychological well-being (e.g., self-acceptance, self-esteem) and self-actualization (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009; Maslow, 1954). This learning, together with a sense of personal identity and belonging, fosters agency and personal transformation (Hahm, Ro, & Olson, 2018).

As Bilodeau and Renn (2005) indicated, the development of sexual orientation and gender identity is a fluid and complex psychosocial process. Though some participants’ discovery of new gender identity and sexuality categories helped with their identity development, others who learned about gender and sexual fluidity learned about their own fluidity. This learning was articulated well by Luna (OUTstages) who identified as trans:

Animal Medicine was the first show I’ve ever seen in Victoria that actually tackled dysphoria as a theme. It was definitely a learning experience. I like to hear other people’s

²⁴ Identities such as pansexual are more fluid identities than traditional categories (e.g., gay and lesbian) and have become increasingly popular, especially among younger queers (Savin-Williams, 2017).

experiences and the way that they are living similar truths because there are so many intricacies and details that are just completely dependent on the individual. . . . It helps me learn about . . . my own fluidity.

Queers have limited ways of understanding different sexualities and gender identities and, as Luna alluded to, definitions and frames of reference are constantly shifting within the queer community. As we learn about other people's experience we can further learn about our own gender and sexual identities and validate our own truths, as Luna and others did. Furthermore, by understanding and accepting sexuality and gender as fluid, we can break away from the more traditional gender and sexual identity labels that can emotionally bind some queers, which I will discuss next.

Challenging labels: Learning and shifting perspectives. Several participants indicated many performances served to challenge rigid definitions, labels, and stereotypes upheld by the queer community. Jamar, Nina, and Blair all mentioned a cabaret performance at Pretty, Witty, and GAY! where the artist was reflecting on their experiences of not feeling accepted in the lesbian community because “she was bisexual and did not look queer enough” (Blair). The performance, as the three alluded to, was educational in terms of how the queer community polices each other based on style of dress, appearance, and behaviour. They indicated the importance of learning about this policing was that it illustrated the enforced norms and fixity of sexuality that exists, and it highlighted the need to embrace greater fluidity. Nina (PWG) pointed out it is important to hear these stories to “learn about the impacts stereotypes have so that we can shift them.” It has been well documented bisexuals face a “double stigma”—not only from heterosexuals but also from lesbians and gays who police and uphold rigid sexual and gender identities (Barker & Langdrige, 2008; Matsick & Rubin, 2018).

Queer cultural labels extend beyond sexual and gender identity to labels based purely on appearance and gender expression (e.g., daddy, boy, twink, fishy, bear, leathermen, lipstick lesbian, butch lesbian, femme)²⁵ and sexual practices (e.g., bottom, top, versatile, submissive, dominant, eroticization of leather gear). Stereotypes also exist based on these labels. For example, a daddy is often synonymous with being a top; being a femme lesbian is often synonymous with being a bottom; and being butch is often synonymous with acting more masculine. Queers must learn what is meant by these labels and learn to recognize their signifiers (Levitt, 2006). Though the performances provided opportunities for audience members to learn these labels, they also at times challenged them. For instance, the performance *Midnight Toronto* (Rhubarb) disrupted the notion of daddy and bear. Jon (Rhubarb) addressed this disruption as follows:

One of the main characters is this tall gay scruffy guy that can fit the stereotype of what a daddy or bear might be, but he doesn't see himself that way and he talks about how limiting those labels are. And he gets very irritated that the guy he is hooking up with puts this label [on him]. This idea of who he's supposed to be, this aggressive, bear, dom, top-type figure, when he is not any of that. . . . I think in seeing *Midnight Toronto* you re-examine these labels and these titles that we give ourselves.

By calling into question such labels and by providing new frames of understanding and reference, performances such as *Midnight Toronto* caused Jon and others to re-examine the limiting prejudices attached to these labels.

²⁵ Several performances provided opportunities for audience members, particularly straight-identified and new queer community members, to learn new terms. However, even participants who have been part of the queer community and have been out for some time learned new labels. For instance, two participants and myself learned that the term "fishy" meant to act or to be feminine.

Learning about drag and challenges to mainstream drag. For a few participants, particularly those who identified as straight or who were newly out, the festivals also provided an opportunity to learn about drag—a staple of queer culture. However, even a few participants who had experienced drag learned something about the practice, as many “the drag performers [at the festivals] challenged traditional drag” (Nagamo, OUTstages). Particularly, several participants who had been exposed to drag previously discussed that the drag performances at the festivals were for the most part not mainstream or traditional drag, whereby drag queens imitate female gender signifiers and drag kings imitate male gender norms. At all three festivals, there were bearded drag performers dressed in “female” signifiers (e.g., heels) and drag performers displaying “male” signifiers (e.g., beard) while showing their breasts. Though participants learned about drag, the drag performances were effective at educating some festivalgoers about the boundaries and essentialist definitions of gender and sexuality and other phobias, as Taylor and Rupp (2006) also found. In talking about the effectiveness of the drag performances, Nagamo (Rhubarb) went on to explain, “many of the drag performances were educating the audience about gender roles and [gender] fluidity . . . fat shaming, body shaming . . . and other phobias” and seeking to eliminate these phobias.

Learning about and transgressing other normativities. Body issues; queer relationships, sex, sexual practices; and hypermasculinity. Several performances resulted in learning about body image; sex-positivity; different types of relationships; different sexual practices such as BDSM, kink, and other queer fetishes (e.g., leather); and hypermasculinity. This learning largely occurred as a result of performances challenging heteronormativity and homonormativity. Jesse (Rhubarb) explained, “I definitely think the festival helped me learn about and to look at my own queer body. You know, society has this image of a gay male and

this idea of being masculine and toned.” Toby had a similar experience at OUTstages. In referring to the images presented by the drag performers, he stated, “I really reflected on . . . and learned about my hang-ups with the general expectations around the body and image.” The drag performances thus served as acts of transgression that challenged essentialist definitions of gender identities, gender and sexual norms, and categorization, and had the performative power to create politicized discussions in an accessible way (Butler, 1990, 1993; Clum, 1999).

In regard to queer relationships, Billy (OUTstages) indicated how one of the monologues during the *Queer Songbook Orchestra* performance was meaningful because it “embraced sex-positivity and the spontaneity of queer lives in finding lovers.” He went on to state how the monologue served to challenge mainstream love stories of finding one partner and getting married and it taught people about the various types of queer relationships that exist (e.g., polyamory). Building on this, four Rhubarb festivalgoers spoke about the importance of being more sex-positive across generations; a topic explored in the performance *What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex*. Daunte (Rhubarb) stated:

It was really speaking to elders, but also to young people about sex. The gay world can be a bit ageist and youth focused. But the show was very refreshing and very healing in a way because it made you realize that being gay isn't just about being young and nubile.

There is also being gay as someone over 60 who still has sex.

For Daunte, learning he was not alone as someone over 60 years of age still engaging in sex allowed him to overcome some of the shame he was experiencing. Overall, he felt the performance taught audience members, both young and old, to be more open about and to embrace their sexual experiences. The same performance had a similar impact on a younger participant, Jesse (Rhubarb), who said:

I remember coming out of that performance and thinking that it is counterproductive that when we reach a certain age we stop talking about sex because “it’s a bad thing” . . . but as the performance highlights, older people have a lot to offer in terms of [teaching us] safety, consent, and so forth. . . . So, it is a mission I have now when I get older [to talk about sex].

Daunte, Jesse, and other participants acknowledged social norms made it difficult for older adults to express their sexuality even in the more open queer community. Though participants learned about the types of sexual experiences older queers were engaging in, the stories also importantly educated participants on the importance of safety when engaging in such acts. The prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) has been rising faster in older demographics. In a recent Canadian study that looked at STIs in Canada by various age demographics (less than 15 years, 15–19 years, 20–24 years, 30–39 years, 40–59 years, and 60 years and older), people 60 years of age and older were found to have the highest relative increase in cases of chlamydia and the second highest increase in cases of gonorrhea between 2013 and 2017 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2019). Education is key to improving sexual health, and the higher increases in certain STIs can be partially explained by the lack of sex education in schools when older adults were school age (Johnson, 2013; Patel, 2019).

Though there was much discourse about sex-positivity, a few performances did address the negative aspects of hook-up culture. Jon (Rhubarb) explained:

There is the idea in the piece that sleeping with people you barely know becomes the usual and that you just become numb to it. And you begin to ask when it is enough? And are we forgetting to find love in the process?

For Jon, the performance caused him to reflect on his own experiences with hooking up, and he came to realize the negative impacts it may be having on him. The performance thus invited the audience to reflect on hook-up culture and to learn of the potential negative aspects such as potentially increased levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression that have been documented in academic literature (Taylor, Hutson, & Alicea, 2017; Watson, Snapp, & Wang, 2017). Though people can learn about such things through other modes (e.g., reading about them), hearing and witnessing the vulnerability of the performer promoted audience members to reflect on their own sexual experiences and practices more deeply.

Several performances at all three festivals educated audience members on the hypermasculine culture that exists in the male queer community. For instance, a current phenomenon addressed in a few performances was the usage by some gay men of the phrase “masc-4-masc,” particularly on dating apps where it is used to describe a man who can pass as straight or acts masculine, and who is only interested in dating other masculine men. Dany (Rhubarb) pointed out how performances challenged masc-4-masc:

There is still a hatred of effeminacy. I think it is all rooted in misogyny . . . It’s all rooted in straight male fear of being penetrated . . . And this whole “masc-4-masc” bullshit . . . Many of the performances are asking us to question this and teaching us why this is problematic and are pushing these buttons in a really strident way. So, it is great that there is this radical art at the festivals. We need this polemical art.

By educating audience members on the hypermasculinity that does exist in queer culture and why it is problematic, the performances seek to deconstruct and to provide alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. By subverting traditional gender performativity, the performances

“offered a new androgynous model uniting masculine and feminine representations” (Kac-Vergne, 2012, para. 29).

Learning about queer intersectionalities. Participants such as Koen acknowledged that queer identity(ies) intersects with other identities:

We are not just queer people right? We are also Black, we are also Aboriginal, we are also poor, Asian, and so these things also need to make it into our conversations. . . . One of the things that I saw at the festival and is important is that there were a lot of diverse voices; people of colour, Indigenous people, and [queer] women. There very much was a space and a voice for these typically marginalized communities within the queer community. (Koen, Rhubarb)

Whether it was Indigenous queers, two-spirit queers, queers with disabilities, queers of colour, queer women, queer Indigenous women, immigrant queers, religious queers, or queers from other cultural backgrounds (e.g., Mexico, Jamaica, Venezuela), all three of the festivals illuminated intersections in the queer community and the multiple layers of oppression these groups face. Several performances also addressed the intersection of queer issues with other issues, including racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and environmentalism. Performances about different intersections and the conversations that ensued between festivalgoers provided significant informal learning opportunities.

The intersection of being spiritual or religious and queer was a major theme of Pretty, Witty, and GAY! As Liam (PWG) indicated, “we often talk about religion and queerness here in Lethbridge because it’s something that’s big. We are a religious community.” Participants from Pretty, Witty, and GAY! spoke of the importance of hearing spiritual and religious stories

because it helped those who were not religious understand the complexities of being religious and queer and because it resulted in increased empathy. Jamar (PWG) explained,

I had a good friend who was raised in a Mormon household, and I know their past, but their song [at the cabaret] really shed light on the effects of religion and how it can linger. I think when we learn these things about people we can relate to them and are more empathetic.

As with intergenerational discourse between queers, the increased ability to relate to others with different experiences and beliefs fostered empathy and a greater connection between different queer communities, which Jamar explained.

The intersectional topics at Rhubarb and OUTstages went beyond being queer and religious to issues of race. The following quotes from two participants highlight the learning about queer Indigenous individuals and queer people of colour that occurred:

It was positive to see a number of shows about First Nation issues in Canada. . . . For me it really helped me learn about two- and six-spirit and to feel more confident in talking about these things (Sam, Rhubarb).

Animal Medicine was talking about something that is real and happening now. It was reflecting not just the sense of their experience with being queer but their experience with gender, race, nationality, and First Nation status. . . . Other shows like *Songs of Resilience* gave me perspective of the experiences of queer people of colour. I have a limited understanding of Indigenous queers and queers of colour because I have not had the chance to hear from them. The most in-depth stories that I have heard about these groups have come from OUTstages (Billy, OUTstages).

Other performances such as *White Girls in Moccasins*, which tackled multiple intersections, also resulted in learning and shifted people's perspective. Tanisha (Rhubarb) explained:

It was a reminder to be aware what you're taking in and it's very much about accountability and being responsible for the lies that you tell yourself or others . . . about racism, cultural appropriation, women's rights, queer rights, and human rights. . . . It was like a little nudge. Like okay, you have [these thoughts] inside you, you just need to . . . open your eyes a little bit more. I still hear a lot of people saying that racism doesn't exist within the queer community, and I am always so shocked that some people are so clueless. And I think the show is just a tiny peak into what it's like for someone who is an Indigenous queer woman. . . . It is important to have these stories told in a safe place where you can share and where others can learn, which is key to creating change.

Many other participants who saw the performance *White Girls in Moccasins* discussed how they also felt this nudge that opened their eyes. For example, Max (Rhubarb) explained the performance "centred Whiteness in a way [he] was able to have access to the conversation" he felt he had not had before. As a White male, he explained the spoken words together with the visual element as embodied story on stage provided an entry point to understand Indigenous experiences and allowed him to "hear" the issues more effectively. As a result, he indicated the performance provided him with a deeper understanding of the impact of racism and Whiteness on Indigenous peoples. Figure 9 is an image of a completed postcard survey that shares similar sentiments based on the performance *White Girls in Moccasins*.

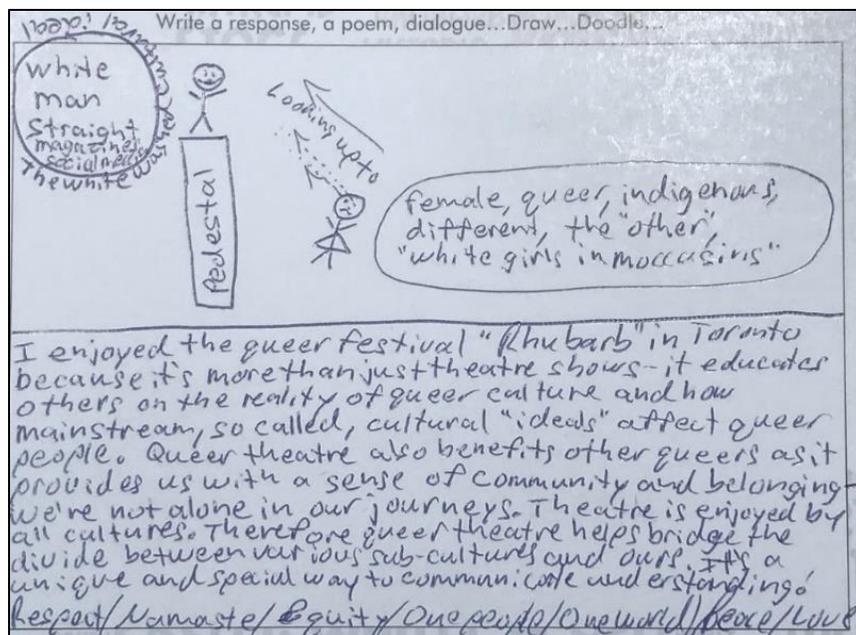


Figure 9. Completed postcard survey from the Rhubarb festival.

Another important element was the learning that emerged from performances with themes about queer experiences in other countries and immigrant queers. For example, several participants (including me) indicated they learned about queer experiences and culture in Venezuela as a result of the performance *Chico* at Rhubarb. Jon, Miguel, and me (based on journal notes) elaborated on this learning:

I found the show very informative. It was entertaining while also teaching us about queerness from a Venezuelan perspective with a religious culture (Jon). It was an opportunity to learn about being queer in Venezuela and its challenges. I didn't know about beauty queens or that it is one of the most vain countries in the world. . . . It was teaching us facts about the consumption of cosmetic products in Venezuela (Miguel). The performance informed us that Venezuela has one of world's highest ratio of beauty queens, rates of cosmetic procedures, and spending on cosmetic and personal care products per capita (Alan).

Though such performances allowed audience members to learn about queer experiences and queer culture in other countries, they also discovered shared experiences. For instance, Lucas (Rhubarb/OUTstages) indicated the performance *Chico* at Rhubarb taught him about the misogyny faced by effeminate male queers in Venezuela, a phenomenon he indicated is prevalent in Canada as well.

Though the majority of queers have faced discrimination and oppression, the intersectional performances taught audience members: (a) everyone had their own unique experiences and (b) social identities and social inequalities based on sexuality, race, gender, etc. are not additive but rather intersect in complex ways (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This learning is significant because “as we learn about each other and our differences, the bridges between us get a little smaller” (postcard survey, Rhubarb), which foster a more inclusive and intersectional sense of queer community. Learning about queer intersectional experiences served as a call for queer social movement members to incorporate an intersectional lens to address hidden inequalities beyond the queer identity itself. I will return to the importance of learning about queer intersectionalities from the perspective of the queer social movement as a whole in Act Five.

Learning About Current and Ongoing Queer Issues. Several performances provided learning opportunities about current and ongoing internal and external struggles and issues facing queers and the queer social movement, including gaining social acceptance; addressing racial, gender, and economic inequalities; tackling violence and bullying; and the aforementioned heteronormative and homonormative assumptions around sexuality, gender, and body- and sex-positivity. This learning was well-articulated by Jesse (Rhubarb) who stated:

We still have work to do, we still have things to overcome, we still have connections to make, we still have queer voices that need to be heard. . . . We actually don't have a lot of spaces. We have bars and nightclubs but there is only so much culture that you can get from that and only so many types of voices. Whereas, I think Rhubarb allows for greater diversity to come in and the voices at the festival are really showing what still needs to change and the direction the [queer] movement needs to go. . . . Like gender and sexual fluidity . . . racism, violence against us . . . even racism and other inequalities.

Though the queer social movement has made remarkable progress legally, socially, and culturally, there still exists internal and external struggles that need to be addressed. For Jesse and several other participants, the stories shared by performers and the dialogue at the festivals highlighted the additional work that still needs to be done to advance the queer social movement to achieve greater acceptance for queers.

For several participants, learning about the current and ongoing struggles resulted in emotions of anger, which was fostered by expressions of anger by performers themselves. This anger, however, was a motivating force. Brad (OUTstages) explained the impact that the Youth Cabaret performances had on him as follows:

There was a lot of anger in their performances. . . . I felt it. It gave me more insight into their lives and their struggles, and it made me angry about how they [trans people] have been treated. . . . It has pushed me to want to do more to help change things, there's so much more work that still needs to be done.

Learning about current and ongoing queer issues together with fuelling emotions of anger of the existence of such issues is significant because it motivates people to take action to challenge the

status quo and create the social change they desire. In other words, the learning and activation of anger cultivates resistance capital.

Theatre and Performance Literacy

The majority of performers I interviewed indicated the festivals provided significant opportunities for them to learn new technical or performance skills. For example, Jose (Rhubarb) indicated:

I didn't go to theatre school, so the experience of being involved at Rhubarb [as an artist] is huge. It is an educational experience. I got to learn from other artists but also got to learn operations behind the scenes [e.g., lighting and sound].

As Jose and the majority of performers noted, the festivals provide opportunities to connect with other queer artists and to learn from one another. These connections have led to lasting relationships; relationships that for Luna (OUTstages) and many other artists have “helped with the ongoing development of” their work.

The cabarets at all three festivals were significant for developing theatre and performance literacy for emerging artists, as it gave emerging artists the opportunity to learn from more experienced performers. For instance, Deion stated by being in the *Pretty, Witty, and GAY!* Cabaret, he “got to meet other drag performers and observed their genre, style . . . performance techniques . . . fashion, and makeup,” and he found himself “learning from them.” Festival curators recognized their role in cultivating an environment that fostered learning between artists. One curator explained:

In the programming, I do try to balance senior-level artists with emerging artists. We're not just showing new voices, nor is this just a platform for famous people. . . . I create cross-pollination by programming artists with different ideas, who are at different stages

of their careers, who have different creation models and performance forms, and [who have] different stories to share. So, the group of artists I bring together is very diverse . . . and in doing this they have a lot to learn from each other . . . artistically. And over the course of the festival, they get to know each other and go and see each other's work, and they're all learning together.

Overall, the festivals served as “a research and learning hub” (Niki, Rhubarb) by fostering the development of a community of practice for artists in the festival spaces (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2017).

The Ways in Which Learning Emerged

There is nothing worse than . . . being told what to do or think, especially when things that you're being told you're ignorant [to]. . . . The performances are more about asking questions or telling people how things are . . . and that gets us thinking and talking. . . . The different performances speak to each other and it is easier for you to realize that when you are seeing multiple shows in a short period of time. There are a lot of different communities and points of views on things in the queer community. . . . So, I think the performances are creating dialogue about our differences and providing different points of views that definitely “talk to each other” and then connect us all.

—Jose (Rhubarb)

Learning at the festivals was—for the most part—not didactic, but rather unstructured and unplanned. The acceptance to the unstructured and unplanned nature of learning was in regard to the two panel discussions at Rhubarb and the University of Victoria's Transgender Archives talk at OUTstages. The two panel discussions at Rhubarb provided learning opportunities for artists; the first panel discussion was about the responsibility artists had in

telling stories about mental health; and the second was a discussion about how to finance the creation of art. During the Transgender Archives talk at OUTstages, attendees learned about trans history and about the history of the archives.

Performers were evenly divided in the educational intentions behind their work. Though some artists did not explicitly set out to educate audiences, they understood their art would indirectly do so. For instance, Niimi (Rhubarb) explained, “What I do is ask questions and invite the audience to engage with the questions and the art . . . and learning does come from that.” Other performers, however, had education as their primary objective in creating and performing their work. For example, Jo (OUTstages) stated: “My goal is to educate people about trans issues.”

Overall, informal learning emerged from the dialogical effectiveness of the performances (Boal, 1998; Freire, 2000; Jackson, 2005). Informal learning occurred from the experience of witnessing a performance and its effect on festivalgoers (i.e., how the audience learned) and from creating and performing a piece (i.e., how artists learned). It is important to note the learning that emerged did not privilege the cognitive over the body or the affective. What became clear in this study was learning was “distributed—stretched over” and “not divided among” the mind and body (Lave, 1988, p. 1). As Clover (2009) rightfully said, “the arts are not just about what we feel but also what we think” (p. 539). I begin with a discussion on the major ways in which audience members learned—which includes artists since they too were audience members for the most part.

The Experiential Domain: The Playful

As Dewey (1934) reminded us, we cannot reduce the work of art to only the aesthetical appreciation it produces, as “the actual work of art is what the product does with and in

experience” (p. 1). Crucially, the context in which one views and engages with art is key to how one perceives, reacts, and thus learns from art. As noted in Act Three, the festivals provided an inclusive, safe, social, and experimental environment. This environment afforded festivalgoers with the opportunity to meaningfully engage in the art through the body, reflection, and collective reflection, which resulted in learning. Learning occurred through three primary ways as a result of festivalgoers’ experience: (a) by hearing and listening and the visuals and the embodied/somatic experiences, (b) individual reflection, (c) collective discourse and reflection, and (d) as a result of festival design elements

Learning through hearing and listening and the visual and embodied/somatic experience. Theatre has the unique ability to engage various learning styles and modes (Kalidas, 2014). Not only did performers voice their experience through spoken words, but also they did so through their bodies and other visuals (e.g., pictures, props, other visual images), which emanated discourse (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Thus, audience members learned by listening to the stories told, from the visual and embodied texts presented, and from the embodied/somatic reactions they had as they witnessed a performance. I begin with a found poem (words in italics are my own or from other scholars) to capture how the visuals presented in performances together with the embodiment of performers resulted in learning.

“The body has many stories” (Clark, 2012, p. 426)

I have two-spirits living within me
 It is hard to articulate
 It always comes through in my performance (Nina, OUTstages).

I embody my politics
 Being within my body can help folks who don’t feel like they can [embody their politics]
 have access to a right to feel like they can
 to ask questions
 to learn . . . about themselves . . . [but also] about others (Thea, Rhubarb).

[As a trans person] a big reason why I . . . perform topless a lot of the time is not to sell sex but to challenge [binaries]
 to give people a space
 to explore that same kind of thing that's in themselves
 to be more positive about their bodies
 to learn (Kirra, PWG).

There are stories in my body, but I don't know what the stories are (Yian, Rhubarb)
 Art . . . sits in your body (Adela, OUTstages)
Art can awaken and reveal hidden stories (Bochner & Ellis, 2003)

The performances actually allow
 Emotions
 Stories
 Feelings
 Thoughts
 History to move through the physical body (Niimi, Rhubarb).

[The queer artists] already have the scars on their body
 you really learn from seeing that (Avery, OUTstages)

His intensity was quite emotional and touching
 Moving and using his body
 HER voice (Lily, Rhubarb).

Her body
Her scars from surgery
 They were representing masculinity and femininity
 It challenged social clichés [about gender]
 It helped me learn
 It made me understand what it would mean to be nonbinary (Sophia, PWG).

Sometimes you need to see things in order to fully understand it, it is beyond language
 (Nina, OUTstages)

It is like a visual collage
 The multiple gender expressions they embody
 They transcend genders (Nina, OUTstages).
 You learn from that visual what it means to be two-spirit (Kanesha, OUTstages).

The body words itself (Nelson, 1978).

Stories and society, including social structures and oppression, were manifested through many of the performing bodies at the festivals (Quinn, 2018; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987).

This discourse through the body resulted in learning for many audience members. For example, Jesse and Niimi commented on the learning that occurred as they watched *Gashkigwaaso* at Rhubarb:

The show [*Gashkigwaaso*] was mesmerizing for me. The words spoken were not in English and it wasn't something I understood. But the body and physical aspect of it really impact me, especially when he put on heels. It really spoke to me about duality. Like there was this warrior aspect to it, but then he was wearing heels. The image really embraced the idea of being two-spirit and questions the structures of the world where we assume there is just boy or girl (Jesse). I felt the history and information about Indigenous culture. I felt I received the story of the water on his people's land and their experience with it and how it has affected them. It . . . [was] a visceral learning experience (Niimi).

For Jesse, Niimi, and others, the performer's authentic embodiment of being two-spirit educated them by showing what two-spirit looked like and the cultural significance of two-spirit individuals (i.e., individuals bearing gifts of knowledge and insight, and embodying roles such as visionaries, healers, warriors, medicine people, and leaders). Participants also indicated the performance educated them on the general history of Indigenous peoples and on the oppression they continue to face. This education was initiated as a result of the spoken words, visuals presented in the performance, and performer's enactment of their story.

Four participants from the Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival spoke about a performance at the cabaret where a performer held up a large mirror and showed various angles of his body. Though there were no words spoken by the performer, the interview participants highlighted how this action resulted in education. For example, Jamar stated, "through their embodiment we understand that we don't actually have to define ourselves on this binary." Similar learning

occurred from the drag performers, many who embodied both masculinity and femininity. These performances educated audiences by challenging the structural binaries of gender society holds. For another participant (and for me), the nude performance at *Pretty, Witty, and GAY!* also showed body-positivity and gently nudged us to learn to love our bodies, and that the nude body, and all of its flaws, should be celebrated. This lesson, ironically, emerged as we reflected on our own body shame. The knowledge revealed itself as we came to recognize this body shame—witnessing the gap between who we wanted to be and who we were or thought we were (Fussi, 2015; Walker, 2017).

Audience members also contributed to embodied discourse by queering their own bodies. The festivals were “not this one-sided transaction where you give your money and see a show; you can come [contribute] with your own artistic expression” (Jon, Rhubarb). As discussed in Act Three, several festivalgoers dressed in drag. These embodiments and visual texts further contributed to gender variance discourse and learning. Aharon (Rhubarb) indicated he was caught off guard when he realized “a guy” he thought “was so hot, was a drag king.” He went on to explain such visuals and embodiments taught him a lesson on what it means to be gender fluid and queer.

Though learning through the visual and the embodiment of others was cognitive, learning was often initiated as a result of the embodied/somatic experience of audience members themselves. In many instances, a performance stirred up affective responses by touching something deep in audience members, such as a personal experience or an empathetic connection with the performer through an issue they were addressing (e.g., the oppression of queers; Lawrence, 2008). For example, Nina (PWG), who is not religious, found herself sympathizing

while watching Mama Didi sing a song at the Pretty, Witty, and GAY! cabaret about being queer and religious. Nina stated,

I just felt it in my body, and I almost started crying because I could feel their struggle really come through. . . . I really felt in that moment that I understood this struggle. . . .

And I looked around the room and thought, “Oh, most people here have experienced this struggle.” It was powerful.

Thus, emotional reactions manifested by witnessing performances often resulted in a deeper understanding of the issues and struggles of being religious and queer and resulted in empathy development. These affective reactions and somatic experiences also invited audience members to embody their own oppression and life stories, which led to personal and collective reflection—a powerful example of how emotions can trigger critical reflection (Brookfield, 1986; Dirkx, 2006; Kreber, 2012).

Individual reflective learning. It has been established that the act of experiencing theatre can stimulate critical self-reflection and provoke reflection on social problems (Bell & Desai, 2011; Jackson, 2005; Norris, 2009; Vettraino & Linds, 2015). As Norris (2009) argued, “theater [*sic*] acts like a mirror, reflecting back at the glimpses of our lives. Its purpose is to help us stop, think, and examine our actions” (p. 152). As I previously noted, participants arrived at self-reflection through a combination of mind and body reactions. In most cases, it was impossible to discern if it was first the mind or body that led to reflection.

The majority of artists interviewed shared Dany’s (Rhubarb) view that one of his goals in producing queer theatre is “to actually try to shock or to unsettle or to force a reflection in the audience.” All but three participants I interviewed indicated they engaged in some level of reflection as they watched the performances. As Kuan (Rhubarb) stated, the festivals are

“definitely a space for reflection.” He went on to explain that being in a queer space “surrounded by queer people” provided a sense of security and safety to deeply reflect. Reflective learning also emerged for performers themselves when they created and performed their pieces. This reflective learning will be addressed when discussing the fifth way in which learning occurred (i.e., learning through creation).

The stories told by performers and their overarching messages often triggered audience members to engage in critical self-reflection and to reflect critically about social conditions and structural inequality. The trigger moments functioned as disorienting dilemmas and were a catalyst for critical reflection (Herbers & Nelson 2009; Mezirow, 2009). Such reflections by participants often led to what Mezirow (1990) called *perspective transformation*, which is “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world” (p. 14). Critical self-reflection ranged from reflecting on body image issues, queer identities (e.g., gender identity, sexual orientation, butch, femme, twink), and sexual practice, to reflecting on struggles with coming out. For example, Blair (PWG), whom I previously spoke about, reflected on her queer identity; Jesse (Rhubarb) and Toby (OUTstages) reflected on their body image issues; and Jon (PWG) reflected on his promiscuity and the potential negative impacts it may have been having on him. For Daunte (Rhubarb), the underlying sex-positive theme of the performance *What Tammy Needs to Know About Getting Old and Having Sex* caused him to “reflect on the hang-ups of queer and straight culture and how this needs to change.” Darius (PWG) indicated that while watching several performances at the Pretty, Witty, and GAY! Cabaret, he reflected on coming out to his parents:

I have been in the closet for a few years now. I am out to my friends, but not my parents or other family. . . . In listening to the stories told by the performers, I was reflecting about why I have not come out to my parents yet and thought about what that might look like when I do.

For Darius, the reflection resulted in him learning about his fears in coming out and the potential outcomes that could result if he decided to do it.

Several participants indicated they also reflected about their social conditions and structural inequality, particularly in regard to racism and the patriarchal nature of society. In many cases, such reflection occurred as a result of audience members being challenged or pushed outside their comfort zones by performers. Crucially, as Aimée (OUTstages) explained, the performances challenged and provoked, “pushed the audience in a beautiful gentle way,” and opened up space for learning and reflection. As someone who was religious, Hayden (PWG) explained the performances about religion and queerness were challenging to hear. He went on to state, “I was a very sheltered religious person in my upbringing. . . . The festival has helped me to reflect on my past and challenged some of my preconceived notions.”

Tyee (OUTstages) indicated that hearing stories about racism and the structures of society that uphold it were challenging to hear but caused him to reflect, which provided him with greater understanding of racism issues and a shift in perspective. He stated:

It is easy for people who say they are not racist to then not participate in a conversation [about it] because they have this illusion that they are not in the system. . . . But if you are White, like I am, and if you have a lot of privilege in that, then you are still complicit in the system and there are ways that you probably are contributing to racism that you are

not aware of. I think in hearing the stories from queer people of colour who are impacted by this we reflect on this and have a better understanding [of it].

Though White queers and queers of colour share some of the same oppressors, as Tyee acknowledged, the performances by queer people of colour resulted in him reflecting on White supremacy, or the racial hierarchy that exists in the queer community as Phua and Kaufman (2003) noted. I, too, found myself reflecting on my White privilege. For example, the performance *Random Closeness* caused me to reflect on my privileged a priori stance that queer police officers should be able to march in uniform in Pride parades. I had this view for several reasons, but mainly because I did not believe queer police officers should have to conceal their identity and thus have their agency taken away. However, in learning about the personal experiences of queer people of colour with police, and particularly learning from seeing their embodied oppression and emotions, I found myself reexamining this view.²⁶ Though reflection and reflective learning occurred in the theatre spaces, they also continued beyond the culmination for the festivals. For a few participants, deep reflection transpired primarily outside of the festival spaces. For instance, Nina (PWG) stated “I didn’t really reflect much at the time, it was more when I got home and was by myself that I did.”

For the three participants who did not engage in reflection, it was because they “did not resonate personally” (Sam, Rhubarb) with the performances or were “pushed too far” outside of their comfort zone (Sylvia, OUTstages). For Sam, the festival was merely a form of entertainment. Sylvia explained she disengaged from the experience because she was “not comfortable learning some of the aspects of gay culture that are definitely more out there.” She felt such discussions should not occur in public spaces. Though this feeling highlights the social

²⁶ I am now of the opinion that the loss of agency and identity for queer police officers is justified in order to provide queer people of colour with the sense of safety and agency at Pride festivals.

taboo around sex and sexual pleasure, it also illustrates that when someone's beliefs or assumptions are pushed too far, it can result in unpleasant experiences that cause people to disengage, which results in a resistance to reflection and learning.

Learning through collective discourse and reflection. Learning at the festivals was collaborative and participatory in nature, a common characteristic of adult education (Brookfield, 1986; Imel, 1991). Due to the social nature and structure of the festivals, festivalgoers exchanged ideas, feelings, emotions, experiences, information, and insights with one another that resulted in learning (Cranton, 1996). Collaborative and participatory learning emerged largely from reflective and collective discourse. Discussions ranged from discussing performance themes and making sense of a performance to sharing personal reflections and stories. The festival spaces, together with the risks taken by performers to share their personal stories and express their queer authentic selves, encouraged festivalgoers to "open up" and share their own stories and reflections. This opening up resulted in authentic dialogue and contributed to greater understanding (Tyler & Swartz, 2012).

Darius (PWG), who reflected on coming out to his parents as he watched the cabaret performances, indicated he ended up speaking with two other festivalgoers who had also reflected on their own coming out experience while watching the performances. Through communicative discourse and reflective dialogue, Darius learned from the shared experiences of the two other festivalgoers and the steps they took to come out to their families. This learning helped Darius learn of other possible reactions his family may have if he were to disclose his sexuality to them. During the 7-day period between the end of the festival and my interview with Darius, he continued to reflect on coming out to his parents. He indicated he had been unpacking his personal "shame," "fear," and "self-hate." Though Darius didn't plan on coming out anytime

soon to his parents, he acknowledged that because of his experience at the festival and conversations with the other two festivalgoers, he is becoming more comfortable with the idea and “some weight has been lifted from my shoulders.”

Many of the performances that brought about deep-seated reactions in audience members resulted in personal reflection that led to collective reflection and discussions following performances. For instance, several participants I interviewed at Rhubarb who saw *White Girls in Moccasins* found the performance incredibly challenging and difficult to watch at times, particularly because of the song in the performance called “There is Nothing More Dangerous than a White Woman.” The song was questioning whether White feminists were fighting for all women or just White women, positing that it was likely the latter. Though many audience members found it a difficult performance to watch, they continued to pay attention, reflected on their own personal experiences, and contrasted them with the performers and other White feminists. Niimi (Rhubarb), a self-identified cis-gendered straight White woman, stated:

I felt really accused and really pigeon-holed. . . . She was looking at us in the audience and based on what I look like I felt specific things she was saying about White women were about me. I was like [long pause] “ok, I am a wreck.” I know it is kind of shitty of me to be upset about feeling stereotyped in this context. . . . But I was angry. . . . I don’t think I am [the most dangerous thing in the world], but I was able to gain an understanding of their perspective and where they are coming from. . . . I realized some feminists haven’t always fought for Indigenous women.

Following the performance, Niimi explained she had a strong desire to talk about the performance with other audience members. Indeed, it was not uncommon to see audience members organically form small groups to debrief and collectively reflect following a

performance at all three festivals. Niimi explained how these discussions put her at ease as she better understood the perspective of performers, but it also resulted in further learning. For instance, it was explained during Niimi's discussion with other audience members that though White women received the right to vote federally in 1919 as a result of numerous groups promoting women's suffrage, it was not until 1960 that Aboriginal women were able to vote—something I learned during the interview with Niimi. This discussion helped put one of the performance themes into greater context: “When you're fighting for women's rights, are you fighting for all women, or just White women (from my journal)?”

Another performance that resulted in significant postperformance discussion was *Ouff* at Rhubarb. The abstract nature of the performance particularly prompted discussion. I interviewed two festivalgoers who were members of a discussion that occurred with two other audience members. They recounted their experience as follows:

It wasn't until after the show when I talked with others that I fully understood it. . . . There was a group of four of us who made sense of the huge pale inflatable thing that filled up the entire theatre and smacked us (Bae). People were, like, “What was that peach coloured prop all about?” We came to understand it as a visual reminder of Whiteness taking up space and eating it, engulfing it (Niki), [and] taking over (Bae). It then had this very resounding message. . . . Particularly, with the idea of female oppression and Whiteness in our society. . . . As someone who is Chinese, I really felt represented in it because I have experienced Whiteness being thrown down my throat (Bae).

As they made sense of the performance and underlying themes, the four individuals engaged in collective reflection about their personal experiences with female oppression and White privilege. For Bae it was both, and for Niki it was the former. Bae went on to state:

It was nice to talk about this with others and bring them into my world . . . and to learn how oppression has affected them. . . . There were some similarities but also differences . . . I think it's good to learn the different ways oppression presents itself.

Both Niki and Bae indicated they continued to reflect on the performance and their group discussion. For instance, Niki went on to state that the collective discussion “is one of those experiences you just don't forget and that you'll think back and reflect on for some time.” Though performers educated audience members through the telling of their personal stories and embodiments, festivalgoers became teachers themselves by sharing their own thoughts and experiences with each other as they engaged in collective dialogue.

As the aforementioned examples illustrate, there was a positive feedback loop as personal reflection during a performance led to collective dialogue and reflection that resulted in learning and further personal reflection. Thus, learning emerged from the “individual | collective dialectic that exists as soon as individuals join to form collectives” (Boyer & Roth, 2005, p. 349). The sharing of personal experiences during collective discourse between festivalgoers not only allowed festivalgoers to learn about one another but also fostered empathetic connections between festivalgoers.

The learning environment: Design elements contributed to experiential learning. As discussed in Act Three, the festival spaces were queered in many ways that included gender-neutral washrooms, the use of pronoun buttons (at OUTstages only), and other queer images and objects. These curated spaces facilitated the production of powerful learning environments that

optimized the potential for learning (Fraser, 2002; Hiemstra, 1991; Radovan & Makovec, 2015). Though education did emerge from these design elements (e.g., the consent campaign posters at Pretty, Witty, and GAY!), it occurred mostly from the shared experience festivalgoers had with one another as they interacted with the elements.

Emmett, a participant at Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, talked about how he initially felt uncomfortable with all of the naked images in the main festival space. After talking with his friend about it, however, he came to realize it was his own hang-ups with nudity and sex that caused his uneasiness. He went on to state it was “a good educational moment about my baggage,” which he acknowledged had been perpetuated as a result of societal structures around sexual attitudes and practices. One participant at the Rhubarb festival and another at OUTstages indicated how the gender-neutral washrooms in the festival spaces pushed people out of their comfort zone and was a good learning experience for them. For example, Ellias (OUTstages) explained:

When I was going to the washroom, there was someone who clearly had never experienced the gender-neutral washroom. . . . They were standing there alone and were like, “I don’t know what to do.” I then explained to them . . . [how it works] and why it exists.

Ellias conveyed that their explanation of gender-neutral washrooms appeared to put the other festivalgoer at ease in using the washroom and it also educated the festivalgoer on the purpose and importance of gender-neutral washrooms.

Self-Learning

Learning continued beyond the festivals as festivalgoers engaged in self-education. For example, several performances provided a snapshot of current and past events and social issues

that intrinsically motivated festivalgoers to go online to learn more about these events and issues.

After watching *Gashkigwaaso* at Rhubarb, Lily explained,

I had heard the name Tina Fontaine, but I didn't know too much detail about her or what was happening. So, after the performance, after he mentioned Tina Fontaine, I did some research to learn about the issues and what was happening. . . . I think these types of performances do inform . . . but also initiate us to find out more what's happening. . . . If I didn't go see the performance, I wouldn't have Googled it, and may not have every learned more about what happened.

The same performance caused two other participants (and me) to use the Internet to learn about six-spirit people. Though we were all aware of two-spirit people, we had never heard the term six-spirit. Several participants shared similar stories of going online to learn more about the murder of Lawrence King (also known as Latisha and Larry King) following the performance of *My Funny Valentine* (OUTstages) and about the Chautauqua movement²⁷ following the performance *Pearl Harbour's Chautauqua* (OUTstages). Learning about these events is foundational to the development of an informed and active citizenry and democratic citizenship (Carpini & Keeter, 2002; Dewey, 2004; Freire, 1973).

Learning Through Creation and Performing

In embodying another character or even another part of yourself . . . it gives you access to so many different parts within yourself. You're allowing yourself to be free from yourself and there is a lot of learning in that.

–Kirra (PWG)

²⁷ The Chautauqua movement was an all-denominational adult education movement in the United States that began in the 1970s. The movement provided programs in large tents that travelled the country; music and other forms of entertainment were often employed (Scott, 1999).

The process of creating a performance and performing also resulted in learning. For instance, several artists indicated that substantial research went into creating their performance or role. In addition, and less obvious, was the knowledge artists gained due to the reflexive nature of performing. As Langellier and Peterson (2006) explained:

[A] performance is reflexive because the performer is audience to ~~her or his~~ [their] own experience and turns back to signify this lived world with and for an audience . . . [It is] a doing and a re-doing that allows scrutiny of experience, self, and world. (p. 155)

Metaphorically, it is as if a performer is “playing in a house of mirrors” (Vettraino & Linds, 2015, p. 1) by providing a significant opportunity for performers to engage in reflective learning.

To provide an example, I return to Raúl’s (Rhubarb) story, which was mentioned in Act Three. In creating and performing his story, Raúl reflected on his queer identity and scrutinized his queer performance in various contexts, on and off stage. Prior to his performance at the queer theatre festival, Raúl had presented his piece at a nonqueer performance festival. Compared to performing his piece at the nonqueer festival, Raúl indicated that performing at the queer theatre festival was “less nerve racking” and he felt he was able to fully embody his “effeminate self.” As Langellier and Peterson (2006) noted, the setting in which one performs serves as a constraint—or in this case, can disinhibit on the performing body. Because the audience listening and participating in Raúl’s story at the queer theatre festival were either queer themselves or queer friendly, he felt “there was less judgment” and he was thus “more comfortable expressing” his “sexuality.”

Raúl (Rhubarb) also contrasted his experience at the queer theatre festival with his past when he had mostly concealed his authentic queer self. In the redoing of his story, he “felt energy in being” able to be his “effeminate self” in the performance and learned he had

suppressed his true authentic queer self in the past. The performance was thus a transgressive experience for Raúl. He stated, “performing the piece in general, but even more after [this queer festival], I’ve become more comfortably expressing my sexuality outside [i.e., off-stage] of the performance.” Like Kirra (PWG) in my opening quote, the liminal festival space and experience led to Raúl being less anchored to his everyday performance and as a result, he was able to explore and learn about his queer effeminate self. As Cajete (1994) has noted, “the creation of art is an alchemy of process in which the artist becomes more ~~himself~~ [themselves] through each act of true creation” (p. 149, emphasis added).

Though Raúl (Rhubarb) was playing himself—or more specifically, a “redoing” of himself—other performers took on characters based on other people, which also resulted in learning. The following quote illustrates the learning from a performer who played a character based on an actual person:

When you are embodying another character, someone that is a real person and had these real-life experiences, you gain access to a greater understanding . . . I had a deeper understanding of their pain . . . I felt it, and that made me more aware of my White privileged body . . . and better realized the colonial standards and oppression that has affected Indigenous people.

The performer went on to explain how playing this character resulted in her also reflecting on her own life and the oppression she and the character both have faced as women. She explained,

Being involved in the performance also gave me a new understanding of the oppressive beliefs that have impacted me, like beauty standards and of how women are supposed to act. . . . And that we need to stop perpetuating these standards.

Thus, the experience was motivational in terms of working for social change. The performer also found her experience and reflection on the oppression she had faced as a woman resulted in a sense of “healing within myself.” As Wood (2015) explained, “the self evolves through the reflexive stance embodied by the performer when personal . . . narratives are being told and enacted” (para. 10). Further, in stepping into the shoes of an Indigenous person and seeing the world through them, it made the performer “more empathetic towards Indigenous people.” In the next section, I discuss the impacts and outcomes as a result of the learning that occurred including empathy development as alluded to by this performer.

The Impacts and Outcomes of the Learning That Occurred

As to what was learned and how learning occurred, the impacts and outcomes of learning were multifaceted. These impacts and outcomes included: (a) greater unity between queer communities and empathy; (b) healing/therapeutic benefits; (c) hope; (d) allyship development and other actions to bring about social change; and (e) personal transformation. Of course, these were greatly intertwined and interdependent. For instance, increased empathy was often the precursor for empowering queer allyship and social action and for establishing greater unity between queer communities. Likewise, increased hope for a better world led to healing and transformative learning. The reverse was also true: Personal transformation led to increased healing and hope. I will return to these intertwined relationships and the importance of these impacts and outcomes for queer individuals and for the queer social movements in Act Five. In the following sections I provide a summary of these impacts and outcomes.

Greater Unity Between Queer Communities and Empathy Development

There were several performances that made me empathetic to the lives of queer people not like me [i.e., a White gay male] . . . and I reflected back on my own life experiences and contrasted it with theirs. . . . And it connected me a bit more to these communities.

—Daunte (Rhubarb)

I have combined greater unity between queer communities and empathy development due to their intrinsic connection. Participants learned about the experience of other queers, which caused them to feel a greater sense of connection and to develop empathy as Daunte did. By seeing through their own eyes—a position not their own or a story vastly different from their own—empathy became a form of communication by which festivalgoers interacted in an intersubjective gestalt (Biesta, 2001; Schertz, 2007). As I previously noted, Keegan (Rhubarb) developed greater empathy for older queers as he learned of their past experiences. As a result of this empathy, he felt more connected to them because he had a deeper understanding of their lived realities. The same was true for Billy (OUTstages) as he learned more about the experiences of trans people and queers of colour. Empathy and emotion were thus “the ‘glue’ of solidarity” (Collins, 1990, p. 28). For Jesse (Rhubarb), who talked more holistically about his experience at Rhubarb, it was the “meshing of voices from different communities” and “learning from these communities” that made him “more empathetic towards them.” This development of empathy further fostered a queer sense of community—a sense of community that was much more intersectional. In Act Five, I further elaborate on the intersectional queer sense of community developed at the festivals.

Healing/Therapeutic Benefits and Alleviating Queer Shame

Many participants described their experiences at the festival as healing or therapeutic. A sense of healing occurred as a result of festivalgoers letting go of past hang-ups, learning they were not alone, and reframing or coming to terms with past experiences or shame. As I discussed with Darius (PWG), learning about others' coming out experiences and talking openly about his struggles to others were therapeutic because it took some weight off his shoulders and he felt less alone. For Ellias (OUTstages), who identified as trans, the performance *Animal Medicine* "was really medicinal," especially when the performer had their breasts exposed while wearing a phallus. They went on to say, "that's what I look like when I get out of the shower. . . . It's validating when you see yourself represented." As audience members heard stories from people like themselves—people generally underrepresented in other mediums—it made them more visible and it distilled a sense of queer pride in them. Another example is how Koen (Rhubarb) indicated seeing representation from Indigenous queers on stage provided him with a sense of "self-pride" in being Indigenous and queer.

For others, the sense of healing came from overcoming shame. For instance, Jamie (Rhubarb) explained,

Wayne standing there [talking about sex work and as a survivor of a sexual assault] really felt meaningful and I felt liberated personally. He is a cis White man and who carries a lot of privilege. . . . If this can happen to him, it is not my fault that bad things have also happened to me. It really took some of the burden off of me as a survivor.

As Jamie watched the performance, they indicated they reflected on their traumatic experience of being sexually assaulted. Furthermore, Jamie learned they were not alone and was able to acknowledge the truth of what happened to them. This learning helped Jamie accept they were

not responsible for their assault, and they came to realize the vestiges of shame they still had about the experience.

Several other participants spoke about the healing and therapeutic benefits of watching a performance from the perspective of queer shame. For example, Kirra (PWG) explained the sense of healing and therapy she received from a performance as follows:

The performance hit me so hard and it was just this huge amount of letting go, letting go of a lot of personal stuff. . . . Like shame of becoming trans. . . . Watching that performance was just self-affirming and I could not contain myself.

Queers have been systematically dehumanized by social and political forces causing shame because we believe we do not belong or that something is wrong with us (Walker, 2017). The performances for many, including Kirra, helped guide the transformation of queer shame into queer pride and empowered festivalgoers to accept and embrace their queer selves. Though shame is “integral to and residual in the process by which identity itself is formed . . . [it is also] available for the work of metamorphosis” (Sedgwick, 2009, pp. 59–60). The festivals thus helped festivalgoers shift their perspective away from a “shame-based identity” (as termed by Kaufman, 1992) toward a proud-based identity.

For several performers, the act of creating their performance, which involved reflecting and learning about themselves, and then publicly telling their story to those who were actually listening, was also healing and therapeutic. For example, a performer at Rhubarb said creating their performance helped them have a deeper understanding of their relationship with a family member and that the process of “reflecting and uncovering some memories [to create the performance] . . . was like going to therapy.” Quinn (PWG) articulated well the sense of healing that came from publicly telling stories:

It is great to be able to tell your story. You know you can post something on Facebook, but you don't feel like anybody is really listening. For me personally, I don't feel as accepted for that. Whereas at the festival, there's a whole room that is vocally invested in it, whether that's laughing, crying, cheering, whatever it might be. So, it's validating. . . . That validation of being up there and being loved for who you are . . . carries forward in my everyday life.

Creating and performing their personal stories on stage afforded performers new understandings and led to profound personal changes. For Quinn (and others), being vulnerable and telling personal stories to a group of people who accepted him was self-affirming and provided a sense of pride. The sense of pride had lasting transformative power, which I will discuss in the section "Personal Transformation" below.

A Pedagogy of Hope: Daring to Dream

Overwhelmingly, the performances provided profound moments, utopian performatives as Dolan (2005) labeled them, that lifted the audience "above the present" and "into a hopeful" dreamful imaginative of "what the world might" look like and what living in a world more free and accepting of queers might feel like (p. 5). Though many performances addressed current and past social issues queers have faced and continue to face, they also provided a "narrative that allows us to reinvent and reimagine" the world "in ways that express a critical pedagogy of hope" (Denzin, 2006b, p. 325). A sense of hope emanated from the performances and from many other facets of the festival experience. Kanisha (OUTstages) explained how a performance gave her a sense of hope as follows:

[Pearl Harbour's] *Chautauqua* was hilarious but was also serious. The show and words projected in the tent [speak truth, live pure, right the wrong, and follow the way] spoke to

me about how we are lacking [a sense of] community, and to the crazy post-truth Trump political world we are in. . . . It was calling on us to come back together. . . . Pearl was hopeful that we can change these things, and this gave me hope. . . . That we were all in this small tent and [that] I actually ended up chatting and connecting with people sitting beside me who I didn't know [audience members were given random seats so that they were not sitting beside people they went to the performance with] was a taste of how things could be. . . . We were all feeling this hopefulness that things can be different.

Thus, as Kanasha alluded, a sense of hope was contagious.

The liberating festival spaces themselves also provided a sense of hope. The liminal utopias filled with other queers and queer allies celebrating queers and queer life offered a sense of hope that such spaces and such a world are not impossible to create (Vaccaro, August, & Kennedy, 2012). Max (Rhubarb) who spoke more broadly about hope explained his experience at the festival gave him a sense of hope for the future because he felt “represented,” “not alone,” “supported,” “more connected,” and because it “helped him realize we [queers] aren't as small of a community . . . and are ready to fight if we need to.” In other words, the festivals cultivated greater self-acceptance and optimism things can change, and that we are not alone in our struggles. The feeling of support was amplified by the presence of queer allies at the festivals. Their presence fuelled hope in festivalgoers because it sent a message of acceptance; acceptance that can hopefully be spread to other straight people. A sense of hope was also fuelled by knowing there are activists and leaders—the performers and festival organizers—taking a stance against systemic queer oppression and discrimination. The development of a sense of hope is significant because it cultivates aspirational capital—“the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The sense of

hope created at the festivals was articulated well by comments from Ellias (OUTstages) that I have summarized in the following found poem, *Hope*.

Hope

The festival increased my confidence

It opened the door for me to talk about being trans with my friends
and to share learning and knowledge

I felt like I was connecting to my culture and to my people
My tribe

I feel empowered to be more visible because my batteries are recharged. Rather than being
beaten down by being called horrible names . . . it gives me hope

Hope is incredible!
Hope is wonderful!
Hope is a powerful force!

Allyship Development and Empowering Social Action for Change

The festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to learn about their own privilege and to acquire knowledge about queers and their experiences, which are all necessary for becoming and being an effective ally (Eichler, 2010; Washington & Evans, 1991). The shared and reciprocal emotions and empathy that resulted from learning about others were also paramount to the propensity for straight festivalgoers becoming stronger allies (Jasper, 1998). In this study, an ally “refers to a person who is united to the cause of social justice for a group of people” (Eichler, 2010, p. 92). Of the 10 participants I interviewed who identified as straight, nine of them suggested the experience and learnings enhanced their ability to be a stronger, more supportive ally. Aimée (OUTstages) indicated:

It is sometimes difficult as a cis-identifying straight person to feel like you can be an ally if you are not immersed in the [queer] community. But the festival gave me a better

understanding of queer culture and I feel like I can advocate a bit more and be a better ally.

Hayden (PWG) who shared a similar sentiment explained learning about the oppression queers face allowed him to “become a better ally.”

To my surprise, several queer-identified individuals also indicated they learned more about different queer communities at the festivals, and this learning helped “cultivate allyship within. . . [the] queer community” (Ellias, OUTstages). For example, Lucas (Rhubarb/OUTstages) stated:

I have met quite a few trans people in my life, but I have never been close enough to know their stories or history. Like I have never had a close personal relationship with a trans person . . . I think the biggest benefit of the festival for me was gaining a better understanding of the trans community. And I think this is important and I feel like I can be more of an advocate now.

Thus, though allies to the queer community are typically seen as straight, queers themselves also identified as allies to queer communities other than the community(ies) they belonged to (e.g., a cis-gendered gay man being an ally to the trans community as in Lucas’ case). In learning about other queer identities and communities, these festivalgoers formed new understandings that fostered their transformation into allies.

Personal Transformation

It has been well documented that the arts have transformative powers (Brady, 1999; Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Conquergood, 1995; Dewey, 1934; Fischer-Lichte, 2016; Schechner, 2013; Thompson & Santiago-Jirau, 2011), and that a connection between learning and adult development exists (Merriam & Clark, 2006). Performing personal stories provided an

opportunity for performers to reclaim their agency and improve their self-esteem, allowed audiences a way of getting to know the world through these stories, and helped emancipate both the performers and audience members with similar untold stories (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Sandahl, 2003; Snyder-Young, 2011).

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it should be clear the festivals were spaces where transformative learning occurred in a myriad of ways. For many participants, the festivals provided opportunities to learn about and to come into being their authentic queer selves. For instance, in learning about different queer identities, participants (e.g., Blair, PWG) discovered their own queer identity; through creating and performing, performers (e.g., Raúl, Rhubarb) become more aware of themselves “through each act of true creation” (Cajete, 1994, p. 149); and festivalgoers (e.g., Jamie (Rhubarb), Kirra (PWG), Jesse (Rhubarb), Toby (OUTstages)) overcame traumatic experiences and shame, including queer shame and body shame. Overall, the experience for many festivalgoers resulted in a reconceptualization of self and conscientization as a way of liberation that led to greater self-acceptance, self-confidence, and authenticity (Freire, 1990; Mezirow, 2009). Figure 10 provides a quote collage of additional examples of transformational learning as a result of participating in the festivals. A branch is used to signify transformation is an ongoing personal-growth process (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009).

A Transformative Learning Experience

I'm very unsure about my body, my sexuality . . . But the festival opened my mind. The messages of freedom from the performances helped me free myself from the boxes that society puts us in . . . I can just be myself without shame, and I was moved by the desire to be proud of who I am (Sophia, PWG).

The festival has increased my confidence in living and expressing my queerness. I'm . . . more proud about saying, "I'm a drag performer," instead of leaving that to be something that people discover on their own, [and] getting more comfortable using the term husband instead of partner. . . . Being a part of the festival has helped with my development . . . and the queer person I've become (Noah, OUTstages).

Animal Medicine helped me acknowledge that I am feeling something different inside me like the performer is. It made me acknowledge that I do feel better in boys' clothes and being manly. Like I would rather be a little boy than this female woman that I feel I have to be . . . so, it's validating (Kaya, OUTstages).

While we didn't go there to deliver a message, we went there to be artists and tell our story, I found that we did deliver a message and that it was quite impactful. One audience member who came up to me after the show said that it made him realize that he was wasting his life. . . . He said, "Oh my God, I am letting my life meander around here and I am not taking control" (Peter, Rhubarb).

I really like seeing other trans women performers. It is very inspiring to see them queering gender norms on stage. It makes you realize that you can do it! If you are not seeing trans representation, you might not realize that you can be something you really want to be. . . . It is very inspiring in my coming out to see this (Riley, Rhubarb)

I meet so many people in this region of Canada that are ex-Mormon . . . I went through reparative therapy through the church . . . I was very ensconced in the church. . . . There's a lot of stigma around being a queer person of faith . . . I am still coming to terms with the fact that I still need to pray sometimes. . . . The festival is a big part of helping me come to terms with this . . . I feel liberated (Liam, PWG).

Figure 10: Examples of personal transformation expressed by participants.

**ACT FOUR SCENE THREE: SOCIETAL BENEFITS, QUEER LEADERSHIP, AND
ACTIVISM**

With the goal of understanding how queer theatre festivals contribute to the queer social movement, I was interested in understanding the impact and benefit of the queer theatre festival beyond the festivals themselves. Keeping in mind activists and leaders are inseparable from social movements (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001), I also sought to understand whether the artists and festival organizers could be considered leaders and activists in the queer social movement. In this scene, I discuss findings as they relate to the greater societal benefits of the festivals and the nature of leadership and activism.

Vibrations of Change: Visibility and Downstream Action

Though it is important to have spaces where queers can gather, learn, have their voices heard, and grow both individually and as a community (as noted in the previous scenes), it is also important to achieve wider societal change and to change the hearts and minds of nonfestivalgoers who are outside of the movement. The following found poetic utterance summarizes the metaphors used by participants to describe the contribution they believed the festivals are making toward social change (words in italics are my own).

Vibrations and Seeds of Change

By planting seeds
allowing them time to grow
social change happens

It is like waves
slowly chipping away
reshaping the dark granite bedrock

Sending out actual vibrations into the world
that is what shakes power structures
that is how things change

Seeds are being sown *at the festivals*
 It is about letting them
 evolve
 grow
 flourish
That is how social change happens

(Medika, Rhubarb; Jamie, Rhubarb; Amelia, Rhubarb; Ben, OUTstages)

Overall, I found the festivals brought about (a) greater queer visibility, (b) fostered downstream actions that sought to support queers and further social change, (c) promoted queer cultural capital and queer ways of being, and (d) provided economic benefits.

Increased Queer Visibility

The existence of the festivals themselves was seen by the majority of research participants as increasing the visibility of the queer community. Many participants felt this greater queer visibility invariably led to increased acceptance of queers. As Darius (PWG) explained, “the [visibility of the] festival gives more exposure to the community. It allows people to know that there is a large [queer] community that exists, and this helps increase acceptance.” Visibility was particularly important to many participants in Lethbridge who indicated the queer community was otherwise not as visible and the city was not as welcoming to queers compared to larger cities like Toronto and Victoria. Queer visibility and identity politics—being a conscious politically transgressive strategy employed by queer social movement organizations—have been influential in establishing a queer collective identity and in bringing about political and social change (Bernstein, 2002; Cain, 1991; Joseph, 2010; Whittier, 2017). For J. Taylor (2014a), visibility and identity politics help generate “a collective voice of resistance” (p. 27).

During my travels in the course of conducting my research, it was evident the queer theatre festivals were being held, thanks to advertising and paraphernalia around the downtown cores where the festivals were taking place. Social media promotion by event organizers was

prevalent, as were event posters hung in coffee shops, in restaurants, on telephone poles, and in other public spaces. Though festival posters send the message to the public that queers exist in the city, they also serve as a tool for queer activist discourse (Faria, 2009), as a few research participants noted. Ben (OUTstages), for example, stated “putting a drag queen [and other queer faces] on a poster and putting it downtown” is in and of itself “a kind of activism.” As Faria argued, queer posters help to “destabilize hetero-normative public space, promote a positive queer environment, and expand the boundaries of queer space” (p. 184). In addition, many participants indicated they promoted the festivals and/or their performance (as was the case of the majority of performers) on various social media platforms. Peter (Rhubarb) detailed this social media visibility and how it spread outside of queer spaces:

In terms of the influence on society, my son who came to my show did a big posting on Facebook . . . saying how great it was, and how proud he was, and my daughter did the same thing. Neither of them are queer and most of the people they have on their Facebook pages are not queer.

Such visible actions of support and acceptance on social media are significant because they not only increase the visibility of the festivals and the queer community, but also signify allyship. As several scholars have noted, allies are critical for a social movement’s survival and have been instrumental in contributing to the general success of the queer social movement (McFarland, 2016; Peterson, Wahlström, & Wennerhag, 2018; Rucht, 2008). Research has also found that knowing someone who is queer or who supports the queer community leads to increased social acceptance (Patten, 2013).

Festival sponsors and media partners also played a role in increasing the visibility of the festivals through promoting on their social media platforms, putting up posters, and making

programs available in their establishments. Though some of the sponsors were queer-specific establishments, others were not. For example, all three municipal governments (Toronto, Lethbridge, and Victoria) listed the festivals on their websites. The Joint Pizzeria in Victoria, which does not cater specifically to queers, put up OUTstages posters and had festival programs on hand. This visibility and public support from both sponsors and allies provide social and symbolic capital that serve as a marker of legitimacy for the queer social movement (Cress & Snow, 1996; Joseph, 2010). Overall, the increased visibility created by the festivals promoted a nonthreatening variation of the popular narrative “We’re here, we’re queer, and we are not going away.”

Downstream Action by Festivalgoers: Changes in Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviour

As a result of the education that led to personal transformations from attending the festivals, many participants provided stories about how this transformation had influenced their behaviour and actions outside of the festivals (to which I refer to as “downstream action”). The downstream action varied considerably between festivalgoers. As noted in Act Four Scene Two, the festivals led to increased self-acceptance and self-confidence that empowered queers to behave authentically at the festivals and empowered them to continue do so after the festivals. For instance, Raúl (Rhubarb), who embraced his feminine identity following the festival, gained confidence to continue embracing his authentic self outside of the temporal festival. The positive experience from festival participation also helped festivalgoers to come out and be out in their daily lives. As Thea stated, “the Rhubarb festival had a lot to do with helping me feel comfortable in my own skin and helping me to come out.” Thea explained the major reason for her feeling comfortable with her sexuality and helping her come out was because of the newfound community she discovered at the festival, which enabled her to explore, learn of, and

accept her queer identity. This sentiment was echoed by others. For example, Oliver (OUTstages) stated:

The festival provides a level of visibility of the community, which is incredibly important. It helps anyone who isn't out to feel more comfortable in the community knowing that there are lots of things that are out there that [queer] people are going to. . . . [It also] shows that being seen by the community at large is not [that] scary.

Two participants also indicated how their attendance opened the doors for them to come out publicly at work. In both situations, the participants came out to colleagues while they were participating in small talk about weekend activities. Blair (PWG), for example, explained:

I was talking about how I went to the Jeffrey Dahmer show, and one of the coworkers wanted to know more. I said, "It's a theatre performance put on by Theatre Outré and" [awkward pause she had with coworker] "it's queer theatre."

She went on to explain that attending the festival empowered her to out herself—and in doing so, “it was freeing.” For Thea, Oliver, Blair, and others, the existence of a visible queer community and a space for queers to gather, socialize, and connect were significant for providing a sense of belonging, community, support, and safety that was empowering in owning their queerness outside of the festivals. The act of coming out is a foundational tenet of identity politics—the personal is political—and has been argued to be a useful strategy for improving social acceptance and, thus, helps advance the queer social movement (Bernstein, 1997; Glick, 2000; Smith, 1998). As Hill and White (2015) argued, “it is not possible to build collective power or to challenge stigma when the majority of your constituency is silent and invisible” (p. 2).

It is important to note, however, not everyone, despite positive experiences at queer theatre festivals, has the privilege of being out in their daily lives. This sentiment was expressed

by two participants. For example, Deion (PWG) explained a few of his friends manage their queer visibility depending on the environment they are in. Though his friends are “out to most of their friends” and in social settings like Pretty, Witty, and GAY!, they are not out to their families due to their “families’ cultural and religious beliefs” about queer people. This sentiment is important in that it serves as a reminder of the interconnection between queerphobia and religion and culture; and that while coming out is a form of political resistance, doing so can also have repercussions for the individual (Mucciaroni, 2011).

A few queer participants indicated attending the festivals reminded them of the importance of their community activist work. Their festival experiences made them feel empowered and motivated to take direct action. For example, Nagamo explained she walked away from OUTstages feeling like she “wanted to keep the fire burning that was lit” by getting “more involved” in her “queer community work.” Emmett (PWG) recounted a past story about how his participation at the festival led to him getting involved in a community action initiative. He recounted his story:

It was . . . [my friend] who brought me to my first Pretty, Witty, and GAY! festival a few years ago. . . . It helped me to get more involved in the community and feel not alone. . . . When people vandalized our Pride crosswalk, I went and helped scrub off the rustic paint and tire burns. . . . I heard about [the vandalism] through a Theatre Outré Facebook post that I joined because of the festival. . . . I am not sure I would have went down to help if it wasn’t for feeling part of the community. [Which], like I said, happened because I started going to Pretty, Witty, and GAY!

For other participants, the downstream actions taken were more subtle. For example, attending OUTstages resulted in Noah being “very consciously thinking of [his] pronoun usage

and awareness of people's preference" and embracing the usage of nongendered *they/them/their* pronouns. As scholars have taught us, language matters—it is the doing something with words—as it can change how we think, how we act, and how we see the world (Austin, 1962; Boroditsky, 2011; Butler, 1988). The more people use desired pronouns or embrace nongendered ones, the more common and accepted they become, and the greater the propensity to shift social attitudes. In a recent study on the linguistic device *hen*, a new gender-neutral pronoun incorporated into the 2015 Swedish Academy Glossary, the authors found the use of this pronoun led to more favourable attitudes toward women and queer individuals in public life in Sweden (Tavits & Pérez, 2019, p. 16781).

Importantly, the festivals were also attracting nonqueers. The majority of performers indicated they invited nonqueer-identifying friends to their shows, friends who might not typically have attended such a festival without an invitation. For example, Daunte (Rhubarb) explained, "there were a few people that came because they were people from my workplace. Five of them came on Saturday night, and they would have never darkened the doors of Buddies Theatre before." The attendance by nonqueers at the festivals has the potential to create further vibrations of change by educating nonqueers who can then take this newfound knowledge out into the mainstream. As Hall and Clover (2005) have argued, learning by people who do not directly participate in a social movement is a powerful form of social movement learning. In fact, all nine of the straight-identified research participants indicated how the festival was a learning experience and they had or intended to change their behaviour going forward. Thus, the festivals were fostering the development of new social movement members—providing additional resources to the movement to advocate for queers. The use of proper pronouns and gender-inclusive language, advocating for gender-neutral washrooms, being more comfortable and able

to talk about queer issues (particularly in regard to trans and queer people of colour), and calling out homophobia and transphobia when they saw it were the most commonly mentioned ways in which the straight-identified participants intended to shift their behaviour, or, in some cases, already had. For example, Kaya (OUTstages), a nonqueer-identified participant, explained how her attendance at the festival over the years and seeing and learning from trans performers empowered her to confront someone who used a transphobic slur. She explained:

Being at OUTstages for the past few years and learning more about being trans and meeting trans people has increased my confidence in talking about it. . . . I had someone use the term trannies in front of me . . . I explained to them the concept of trans and that those terms are not appropriate.

In recounting this story, Kaya expressed how the personal narratives from trans performers at OUTstages evoked empathy and a sense of connection. This empathy and sense of connection together with her increased awareness and knowledge of trans experiences and terminology, caused a sense of confidence and a sense of responsibility to call out anyone using a derogatory term to describe trans people. Thus, learning about queer issues and culture enhanced nonqueer-identifying and queer participants' ability and desire to become effective and active allies.

Promoting Queer Culture and Queer Ways of Being: An Alternative to the Mainstream

The majority of participants, including a few who believed the festivals were simply "preaching to the choir" as Isao (OUTstages) put it, felt one of the major benefits of the festivals was that they promote queer culture and queer ways of being. Participants often spoke about the importance of the promotion of queer culture and queer ways of being from the perspective that the festivals were in opposition to mainstream culture. For instance, many participants indicated how the queer images, themes, and narratives of the performances often centered on those

identities frequently silenced in the queer mainstream and are “trying to push norms,” as Amelia (Rhubarb) pointed out. Xavier (OUTstages) explained, “[at the festivals,] you hear new voices and narratives that you wouldn’t hear in the mainstream.” Many participants acknowledged the importance of new voices and narratives, arguing the predominant queer movement organizations, such as Pride festivals, have become too mainstream. Dany (Rhubarb) explained:

As the queer movement becomes more mainstream, the need for a radical opposition, questioning, and interrogations of that becomes more and more vital . . . and that is not only socially, it’s also artistically and aesthetically. Like pushing the sexuality forcefully becomes important because the mainstream queer expression is really about desexualizing the queer experience.

As the movement and other (nontheatre-based) queer festivals become mainstream, these participants and others argued queer theatre festivals, which they viewed as remaining outside the mainstream, are more important than ever. This view was explained by Jamar (PWG) as follows: “The more mainstream Pride gets, the better and the more important Pretty, Witty, and GAY! becomes because you are getting people seeing different queer perspectives that are outside [the mainstream].” As Kates (2003) has argued, Pride festivals are “contested ground for countervailing meanings,” (p. 7) one of which, to participants in my study, is that they are becoming too mainstream. The participants tended to believe Pride has become too corporatized; has silenced queer bodies on the fringes, thus failing to fully observe and celebrate intersectionality; and has attempted to normalize queer identities through a focus on heteronormative rights such as marriage equality. These views are in line with the phenomena Duggan (2003) referred to as homonormativity. At least for now, the queer theatre festivals are largely anti-homonormative.

By promoting the often-marginalized queer culture, queer theatre festivals have an undeniable, and ongoing, effect on queer culture in general. For instance, an organizer from Rhubarb indicated “one of every four Governor General Award winners in theatre has been in the Rhubarb festival,” and went on to argue as a result that “the festival is seeding things that then become a major part of Canadian queer cultural identity.” Thus, by providing a space for queer artists, the festivals transcended queer culture. As many performers pointed out, knowing opportunities existed to showcase queer work in turn encouraged them to produce such work. As more queer art is produced, there are more opportunities for dialogue, understanding, acceptance, and self-transformation, which can further ignite social change. Pragmatically—not to diminish the artistic and creative benefit these festivals provide—there is also an important economic benefit I turn to next.

Economic Benefits

Though this study did not set out to determine the economic impact of the festivals, it would be remiss not to undermine its importance. Though the large majority of festivalgoers were from local communities, the festivals did attract tourists. At each festival, I met several guests who were from out of town. For example, at Rhubarb, I met attendees from New York City; Austin, Texas; and from various cities in Ontario, Canada. In Lethbridge, I met visitors from Calgary and Edmonton. At OUTstages, I met people from up-island communities (including Duncan and Nanaimo) and Vancouver. In addition to attracting festivalgoers from other cities, the festivals attracted many nonlocal artists. These visitors spent money that boosted the local economies.

When asked about the benefits of the festival, several performers alluded to the economic benefit they provided. For instance, Niki (Rhubarb) indicated, “honestly, the lovely thing about

the festival is we get paid; artists are getting paid for their work.” Like Niki, other artists indicated knowing there was the potential to get paid for their work motivated them to produce more queer work. Another economic benefit resulting from the festivals was opportunities for performers to not be limited to one short performance run, but to tour their production. For example, the organizers of OUTstages worked out an arrangement with the Cowichan Performing Arts Centre in which both *My Funny Valentine* and *Queer Songbook Orchestra* would be performed in Duncan, British Columbia following the OUTstages festival. Unfortunately, at the last minute, the *My Funny Valentine* performance was cancelled, and the *Queer Songbook Orchestra* performance was moved to Ladysmith Little Theatre. Nevertheless, such arrangements allowed artists to apply for special touring funding from the Canadian Council for the Arts and helped festival organizers take advantage of economies of scale (i.e., theatre companies could share the cost of bringing in a performance). More importantly to this study, however, is this arrangement permitted queer work to have a broader influence and reach—exposing smaller communities to queer performers and performances where such queer work would have had a difficult time reaching.

Queer Cultural Leadership and Activism

I refrain from offering a definition in this section of activists and leaders, as I did when festivalgoers I interviewed asked me to define the terms. Like Bennis and Nanus (1985), I do not wish “to further muddle the bewildering *mélange* of leadership definitions” (p. 20) that are often contradictory. I also agree with DeCesare (2013) that we should classify someone as a leader if they are perceived to be one by others. I think the same is true for activists.

As the queer social movement has become heavily focused on the production of cultural activities, one of my interests going into this research was to understand the nature of leadership

and activism in this realm. Particularly, I was interested in understanding if those contributing to the production of queer culture are considered leaders and/or activists in the greater queer community. Rather than exclusively asking artists or organizers if they considered themselves leaders and/or activists, an interpretive approach was also taken by asking audience members if they perceived the artists or organizers to be leaders and/or activists.

Participants were directly asked if they considered festival organizers and artists (or themselves if they were a festival organizer or performer) as leaders and/or activists. Nearly all participants were quick to classify organizers as leaders contributing to the queer social movement as a result of their formal positions in creating and running these cultural organizations and events. On the other hand, there was a reluctance to classify organizers as activists and artists as leaders and activists. The reluctance stemmed from the rigid and normative definitions participants had of these terms. Like social movement research itself, leadership has been narrowly conceptualized as referring to those in formal leadership positions of authority (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001; Couto, 1993; Eichler, 1977; Gusfield, 1966; Herda-Rapp, 1998). In other words, leadership has been synonymous with hierarchy (Purkis, 2001). For many participants, notions of an activist consisted of someone who takes direct action, often engaging in confrontation. For example, Tobia (Rhubarb) said, “when I think of activists, I think of them putting their physical bodies in the crossroads.” Similarly, Jo (OUTstages) was “a little reluctant to take on the label of leader or activist because” the labels “apply a level of activity” they “are not doing . . . and involve positions with responsibility” they do not hold. Interestingly, despite the reluctance from all participants, audience members were more likely to classify artists as activists and/or leaders compared to artists themselves. The difference is partly explained by a degree of humbleness on the part of artists.

Initially, I had planned to ask participants only directly if they considered organizers and artists (or themselves if they were a festival organizer or performer) as leaders and/or activists. But I recognized the aforementioned reluctance early on in interviewing participants. As a result, I made a slight adjustment to my approach when interviewing participants. In addition to first directly asking participants if they considered artists and festival organizers (themselves if they were artists or organizers) leaders and/or activists, I probed them to think more broadly about what leadership and activism meant to them. Specifically, I asked performers to articulate the overall purpose of their performance and to relate this purpose back to their understanding of leadership and activism. I also asked audience members to articulate what queer leadership and activism meant to them, and if, based on this meaning, they saw festival organizers and performers as leaders and/or activists. It was during these discussions additional performers articulated their work as a form of leadership and activism. For example, Jo (OUTstages), whom I previously noted did not believe they were a leader or activist, went on to admit their work is “about cultural change stuff, which is like activism I guess, but it is through art.” Audience members were also more likely to classify artists as activists and/or leaders using this new approach

The downplaying by the artists of their roles as activists or leaders—particularly when working in a social justice realm as the majority of the artists at the festivals were—suggests a reframing of established views of activists and leaders is required. I discuss this reframing further in Act Five. In this section, I provide an overview of two subthemes that emerged: *queer cultural leaders-activists* and *queer activist leaders*. I offer these terms as a way to acknowledge and frame the work of festival organizers and performers, respectively.

Queer Cultural Leaders-Activists

As I previously noted, the majority of festival performers and audience members—and, indeed, the majority of the organizers themselves—saw organizers as leaders. In discussing their role as leaders, however, festival organizers were extremely humble, as all made the point they were just one piece of the puzzle in the social advancement of queers. As Hayden (PWG) explained, “We are all in this together, so it is important to build relationships with other organizations.” Several participants felt the organizations themselves were leaders because of their prominence and storied pasts in providing a space for queers to celebrate queer culture through art. For instance, Theo (Rhubarb) stated, “I really think Buddies in Bad Times is the community leader because of their history as a queer cultural institution in being part of a larger queer political conversation.” Viewing an organization as a leader is significant because it suggests a movement away from the assumption that leadership emanates from an individual leader who is responsible for the formation, growth, and success of an organization or movement (Sutherland, Land, & Böhm, 2014).

Recognizing the organizations themselves as leaders in their respective communities, Theo and other participants acknowledged the collective effort of current and past organizational leaders who played a pivotal role in the established reputation of the organizations and for their contribution to queer cultural discourse and social change. In the context of the queer social movement, the consideration of organizations as leaders also provides evidence that the source of legitimacy for the movement stems from support for the principles and ideology of the movement (i.e., equal rights, protection, and social acceptance for queers) rather than individual leaders (Eichler, 1977). This source of legitimacy is to be expected in the queer social movement

because there is no single charismatic leader (or even a few) who stands out and who speaks for the entire movement (Eichler, 1977; Koustova, Kwantes, Thrasher, & Fernando, 2014).

In addition to holding leadership positions in the organizations that run the festivals, organizers were viewed as queer cultural leaders because they: (a) promoted queer culture and facilitated the building of a queer community, (b) embraced intersectionality, (c) took risks by programming queer marginalized voices, (d) provided mentorship to queer artist, and (e) embraced a networked-leadership approach. Since organizers provided support, space, and helped bring about social change for queers, festival organizers, while leaders were also by default activists, despite only a few participants making this connection. I will discuss this problematic further in Act Five. I offer the term *queer cultural leader-activist* to describe the primary festival organizers of the festivals. The term “leader activist” is borrowed from Martin, Williams, Green, and Smith (2019) who argued the connection of activism to leadership is missing from the literature. Unlike Martin et al., I use a hyphen to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between a leader and activist that exists in social movements. After all, how can one be a queer social movement leader without being an activist? In what follows, I unpack the major factors—which are interconnected—that resulted in the primary festival organizers being classified as queer cultural leaders-activists.

Promoting queer culture and facilitating queer community building. As was discussed in other sections, the queer theatre festivals promoted queer culture and facilitated queer community building. Many participants believed festival organizers deserved the credit for this promotion and facilitation because they created the space for queer performances and for queers to gather. Quinn (PWG), who described festival organizers of *Pretty Whitty and Gay!* as leaders, indicated “there wouldn’t be a space for . . . drag and queer performances without them.

. . . They really opened the doors to queer culture in Lethbridge. . . . They have helped build the queer community here.” The queer liminal festival spaces, together with the sense of community established, provided a sense of hope for festivalgoers that all spaces in society could one day be more accepting and freer. As scholars have noted, generated a sense of community and hope is essential to social movement leadership (Ganz, 2010; Helland & Winston, 2005).

Embracing intersectionality. When defining organizers as leaders, participants highlighted the role organizers (particularly, curators and artistic/executive directors) had in selecting the performances to showcase. The programming of queer intersectional voices was a major reason why participants described organizers as being queer leaders. As Jamie (Rhubarb) stated, “intersectionality is so embedded into the way they lead . . . in the performances they select and the community that comes. . . . And that is what queer leadership should be.” All of the organizational leaders I interviewed discussed the importance of inclusion and how they purposely programmed a variety of queer voices, intentionally reaching out to queer communities whose voices have not been privileged. As one organizer stated:

I am constantly taking steps to be more inclusive. . . . The more I learn about the general concept of inclusion, the more I realize that is a Sisyphean mountain that I will continue to climb for the rest of my career.

Working through an inclusive lens that ensures an intersection of queer voices is represented is significant because it helps bridge different queer communities together, which fosters a broader sense of queer community and collective identity—a major finding discussed in Act Four Scene One. In this regard, festival organizers were playing an active role in the ongoing process of constructing collective identity and queer identity framing—an identity frame or narrative much more intersectional and diverse than just gays and lesbians (J. Gamson, 1996; Taylor & Whittier,

1992). As other scholars have noted, framing is an essential part of what social movement leaders do (DeCesare, 2013; Diani, 1996; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Reger, 2007a).

Taking risks by programing queer marginalized voices. Many participants described festival organizers as risk-takers because they created spaces for marginalized voices to be heard, curated shows that pushed boundaries, and programmed nontraditional theatre performances. In fact, the mandates of all three theatre organizations included a focus on pushing boundaries. Boundaries were not only pushed through artistic choices (e.g., experimental theatre, full-on nudity, sex acts), but also by curating performances that provoked and called out social injustices. Risk taking was seen as a leadership trait and was well articulated by Dany (Rhubarb):

They take crazy risks and curate shows that shock, unsettle, or force a reflection. . . . Like the level of nudity and sex acts. . . . Or like the saying in the one performance, “there is nothing more dangerous than a White woman.” So, there is a confrontational spirit and really in-your-face performances that create tension. And it is risky to program those shows because there could be a lot of push back. . . . You aren’t probably going to see these shows programed anywhere else. . . . Leadership is about taking these risks.

Showcasing different voices and perspectives (e.g., allowing performances that involved explicit sex acts, making in-your-face statements about racism in the queer community, calling out capitalism and White women who uphold White supremacy, demanding action for climate change, or calling on police to be banned from Pride parades) took much courage and was inherently risky because it was vehemently political and/or against the grain. As other scholars have noted, risk-taking is central to effective activism and leadership (Burns, 1978; Ganz, 2010; Gardner, 1990; Ryan, 2006)

Providing mentorship and support. When describing festival organizers as leaders, many performers emphasized the organizers' roles as supporters and mentors. As Medika (Rhubarb) stated, "the mentorship they provided . . . and [their] being by your side to support you makes them leaders." Mentorship and support varied from providing feedback on scripts and performances, working with artists to revise their productions, and connecting artists with other artists, to providing general support and encouragement. Avery (OUTstages) saw festival organizers as leaders because of the support they provided him and others to take risks. He explained:

For us as artists, the opportunity to take personal risks with the support of these fabulous institutions, with people [i.e., festival organizers, and particularly curators and executive/artistic directors] who have been there and know better, who have already got the scars on their body and can generally point you away from the potholes is quite remarkable and really important.

Though organizers were seen as mentors due to their guidance, support, and motivation, they were also admired as role models due to the fact they were queer and out. As Medika went on to explain, "even just being out and queer makes them leaders." Thus, the mere act of being out was seen as a form of leadership and activism on its own. Other scholars have agreed being out publicly is a form of leadership and activism (e.g., Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Sanlo, 2001).

Embracing a networked-leadership approach and involvement in the community. Social movement leaders build relationships that link individuals, networks, and organizations (Ganz, 2010). Festival organizers contributed to relationship building by the very act of creating a space for queers to gather. As discussed in Act Four Scene One, festival organizers have also

established relationships and partnerships with other like-minded queer organizations. The connections that have been established between the theatre festivals and other like-minded organizations provided a channel for communication between different groups (Donati, 1984). These connections with other organizations not only helped build queer social capital and a more connected queer community, but also is vital for the success and survival of the queer social movement (Diani & Bison, 2004; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Specifically, these connections are vital for mobilizing the queer community when events that impact the greater queer community occur. In fact, during the last Alberta provincial election, Theatre Outré was involved in helping to mobilize queers along with other organizations to rally against the proposed United Conservative Party reforms to gay- and queer-straight alliances in Alberta schools.

Queer *Artist* Leaders: Art, Activism, and Leadership

Am I an activist? Am I yelling and going to protests? No. Do I express myself through words? Yes. I think my poetry has touched a lot of people because I have a message. So, if you were to ask other people to describe me, perhaps I would be an activist and a leader. . . . What I have to say is relevant. But in terms of who is making things happen in this city, no, I don't think I am a leader. That would be . . . all the other people involved in creating the festival . . . I am a subtle influence. Very much a strong one, I think, but a subtle one.

—Ella (PWG)

Though Ella may not be in a formal leadership role “making things happen”—which was a point of reference for many participants in describing leaders—she acknowledged her poetry had an impact on others, and she had been a “subtle influence” on bringing about social change. Though this response speaks to her humility, it also illustrates the belief held by many

participants that queer leadership and activism for social change is a shared and collective effort. Jesse (Rhubarb) articulated this belief when discussing his role as an activist and leader: “It is like a 1,000-piece puzzle thrown on the ground that we are all trying to build.” In other words, there will be no singular “great person” who will swoop in and bring about positive social change. This viewpoint is significant because it is in contrast to the traditional centralized view of leadership, where leaders have monopolized decision-making powers and domination over a group (Barker, Johnson, & Lavalette, 2001; Meyer & Tarrow, 1998). This view may explain why some artists were reluctant to describe themselves as leaders as Barker, Johnson, and Lavalette (2001) have argued.

Overall, artists did understand their work as activism. For instance, Jamie (Rhubarb) stated, “when I describe my work to someone who has never heard of it, I say it’s arts-based activism.” Jamie, however, was reluctant to describe themselves as a leader: “I think someone else will have to determine that.” As I will discuss, Jamie was mentioned as a leader by audience participants. Before discussing the facets that led to classifying artists as activist leaders, I will discuss two interesting revelations from artists on their activism and leadership: First, they fell into the role unintentionally, accidentally, or reluctantly; and second, the sense of responsibility artists felt they had in creating their work.

Accidental, unintentional, and reluctant leadership and activism.

I guess I would say I’m an accidental activist.

–Tobia (Rhubarb)

Interestingly, many artists who identified as leaders and/or activists described their leadership and activism as unintentional or accidental, and even as a reluctant role in some cases. Several artists expressed it was a role they fell into because of the intersection of their identity as

a marginalized individual and as an artist. As individuals who had experienced oppression firsthand because of their queer identity, artists expressed their desire to bring about social change, and discovered their art was a medium in which to do so. For example, Tanisha (Rhubarb) felt it was “because I was born a Brown queer woman, I was sort of automatically born into activism. . . . And as an artist, my art is one of my ways of lobbying for . . . women’s rights, queer rights, and human rights.”

For other artists, being a leader and/or activist was something that they fell into by accident or was because other people saw them as an activist and/or leader and they accepted their role as one. For instance, Niimi (Rhubarb) explained:

It has taken me a long time to realize that my work is seen as political. After creating and performing that play, I had a lot of people reaching out to me. . . . It made me realize that I am seen as someone who does speak up . . . and I have come to accept myself as an activist.

A few of the artists who did not see themselves as activists or leaders, nevertheless, indicated they were aspiring to be. For example, Luna (OUTstages) stated, “I could own the word *activist*, but I don’t think I am [one] just yet.” Similarly, Medika (Rhubarb) stated, “I don’t think I am a leader yet. . . . I’ll be there. Talk to me in like 5 years from now and it’ll be a yes.”

A sense of responsibility. In discussing their work, a common thread among artists was a sense of responsibility to use their art to stand up for themselves and their fellow queers by calling out social injustices—“to be the change,” as Tanisha (Rhubarb) put it. Daunte (Rhubarb), who shared a similar sentiment, stated:

I think I have a responsibility to share my voice and aspects of my story that might resonate with people . . . [and] that can help change things . . . I think my work as an artist is how I express my activism.

For most artists, their personal integrity and values also held responsibility. As Niimi (Rhubarb) noted, “I am trying to make work that aligns with my values . . . and integrity.” Thus, activism and leadership were not only attributed to an artists oppressed identities and desires to bring about social change, but also to their own self-respect by upholding their own values and integrity (see Downton & Wehr, 1997, who observed a similar finding).

The notion of a sense of responsibility was also expressed by several artists who wanted to ensure they represented queer subjects and queer experiences truthfully and holistically. Theo (Rhubarb) explained:

I have a responsibility to really collect the voices of the community and reflect that back to them . . . I think we are scared to show the troubling ends of queer life; the darker, dirtier corners of it . . . I think it is great that we show the well-adjusted gays and the “glee” moments, but I also think the responsibility I have as a queer artist is to show troubling problematic shit.

For Theo and others, they believed it was important to tell the whole story; not only the glee moments but also the trials and tribulations members of the queer community have and continue to face. This telling of the whole story is important because it is through hearing such stories—unsilencing queer voices—we can come to understand key issues and learn about the “crucial social and political work that needs to be done” (Sandahl, 2003, p. 17).

A sense of responsibility was also expressed by many artists to ensure they did not cause any further harm. For example, in talking about their responsibility in performing in drag, Nagamo (OUTstages) pointed out,

I think there is so much onus and responsibility on those of us in the drag community to always be vocal about the difference between trans and drag, and to also lift up our trans friends. I think being very conscientious and doing drag in a good way is activism . . . and I think leadership too.

For Nagamo, if a drag performance was perceived as being transphobic, then it was not activism or leadership. Like Nagamo, many artists felt it was necessary to consider the larger vision of social acceptance and equality for the diversity of queers. If their actions, words, or behaviour was simply reinforcing systems of oppression or restigmatizing others, then an artist's performance was not viewed as successful queer activism and leadership.

Queer Artist Leaders: Reasons for Being Classified

There existed a blurring of lines between an activist and leader in my data. In some cases, participants used the terms interchangeably when describing artists, but in other cases, it was evident some participants did not make a connection between being both an activist and a leader—the terms were thought of as distinct from one another. This distinction is not surprising given literature on social movement activists and leadership is also vague.

Overwhelmingly, the majority of artists described their work as activism and the majority of audience members viewed them as such too. Though entertainment was a major goal, artists were also using their art as a vehicle for social change. When it came to leadership, a few artists understood their work as a form of leadership within the queer social movement, albeit more audience members who were participants held this view. I have framed the artists as activist

(intersection of artist and activist; *artivism*) leaders, recognizing some were just seen as activists and others as activist leaders. The terms *artivism* and *activist* have been taken up elsewhere in activism literature (see Kara & Reestorff, 2015; Rhoades, 2012; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). The major factors that led to classifying artists as activist leaders were that artists: (a) “expose[d] or purposely challenge[d]” (Riley, Rhubarb) “viewpoints” (Raúl, Rhubarb), “beliefs” (Ella, PWG), and “social norms” (Isao, OUTstages); (b) promoted queer culture and a sense of community; (c) were trailblazers; (d) mobilized people and raised awareness through education; and (e) generated hope and self-transformation.

Exposing and purposely challenging viewpoints, beliefs, and social norms. The majority of audience members understood the performances at the festivals as “theatre in the service of social change” (Prentki & Preston, 2009, p. 12). In referring to several shows, Hope (OUTstages), for example, stated, “their performance was politically charged and made political statements about the world right now and its problems.” By telling their own personal stories and stories about us, artists communicated their grievances and constructed the social realities of a world framed by queer injustice (Ganz, 2010; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). Communicating grievances and constructing social realities is exactly what activists and social movement leaders do (Ganz, 2010; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Offord, 2001).

Promote queer culture and a sense of queer community. As already mentioned throughout this act, the festivals promoted queer culture and queer ways of being, and as discussed in Act Three Scene One, the festivals served to create a sense of queer community. Participants acknowledged it was the hard work of the festival organizers and of the artists who facilitated this sense of community. Promoting and expanding queer culture were seen as both an activist and leadership trait by participants. As Ellias (OUTstages) explained, “it is activism in

the sense that they [i.e., artists] are exposing counterculture [i.e., queer culture].” Jamar (PWG) elaborated queer artists are leaders because they are helping to “create [this] counterculture.”

As to the responsibility of creating a sense of community in the queer theatre festivals, participants saw this as a leadership, rather than an activist role. A sense of community—or networks, as it is often called in academic literature on social movements—is essential to the social construction of collective identity and becomes the responsibility of social movement leaders (Buechler, 1993; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Snow, Zurcher, & Eklund-Olson, 1980; Taylor & Whittier, 1992). The artists’ personal and collective stories combined with the overarching messages of the performances served to unite queer festivalgoers, fostering a greater sense of connection and community (Ganz, 2010). After all, it is because of the existence of the queer performances that queers were gathering and developing networks. For example, Akito (Rhubarb) saw Jamie (whom I previously mentioned and who thought someone else would have to define them as a leader) as a leader: “I think Jamie is a leader because they are creating a community and space for bisexuals and artists.”

Queer artists as trailblazers: Displaying their queer authentic selves. Artists were described as trailblazers due to being courageous risk takers who made political demands that went against the grain of mainstream views and because they embodied their vulnerable, queer, and authentic selves. It was because of these traits that participants viewed artists as activists and leaders. This view was well articulated by Miguel (Rhubarb), who stated:

It takes a lot of courage for artists to get up there and tell their story and perform. They are getting up there and telling very personal stuff and telling people that this is not okay. That I would say is definitely leadership and activism. . . . They are so authentic in doing so and they are taking big risks. . . . Like the celebration of nudity or [the performer]

telling their own trauma and horrifying story on stage about being a sex worker. The vulnerability, it's so raw.

Authentic, the word Miguel used, came up numerous times for those participants describing or alluding to artists as leaders. Billy (OUTstages) explained, “their expression was more truthful, which got me more on board and I was compelled to sympathize with them and their message. . . . That's good leadership.” As Billy pointed out, emotional connections helped to foster solidarity that in turn led to artists being seen as leaders.

Similar to the out queer festival organizers being seen as queer community leaders, participants also felt just “being an out gay performer is activism and demonstrates leadership” (Bob, OUTstages) because “it is often not the norm, and it is often not inherently safe everywhere” (Ben, OUTstages). Ben also brought up the artists whose images were used on publicly displayed promotional material. He stated, “they're putting their face out there, owning their identity, and committing to it . . . and that takes courage and is leadership.”

Mobilizing people and awareness raising through education. Through exposing and purposely challenging viewpoints, beliefs, and social norms, artists shifted attitudes and mobilized audience members to shift their own behaviour and/or to take direct action, as I previously discussed. Teaching and education were at the core of the artists' approach in working toward achieving this objective. In fact, as noted in Act Four Scene Two, to educate was explicitly a goal for several performers. The large majority of audience members alluded to being educated through the act of witnessing performances and saw teaching and educating as a trait of an effective activist and leader. Such teaching helps us overcome ignorance and develops a critical consciousness—a key requirement for positive behavioural change (Freire, 1973).

Interestingly, in discussions with audience members, many addressed a nonpushy dialectic educational approach and its effectiveness. For example, Koen (Rhubarb) explained:

I think one of the reasons why I liked the performances I saw was because they were not pushy with their message. It was like they were guiding us on a journey and educating us. They got up there and performed, told their story, and made us think, and some of it was challenging and hard to hear. But I didn't feel like it was so in-your-face pointing fingers. . . . It was very Canadian of them (laughs).

Like Koen, many other audience members alluded to activism as usually being too in your face or pushy but felt the activism on display at the festivals was not. Several artists specifically talked about striking the right balance between pushing and embracing audience members. This balance was well articulated by Thea (Rhubarb), who stated,

The performance physicalizes the idea of the Whiteness growing and identified the more subtle ways that colonialism impacts Indigenous identities and people of colour. . . . I'm angry and I should be angry, and I think we need to hold space for being angry. It is about finding a balance of pushing people, of waking people up, but letting people be relaxed enough that they are actually hearing it . . . I certainly want people to feel implicated in the story, to feel challenged, to question, to feel anger or charged, but also layering in the playful, the hopeful, and the feeling of buoyance and togetherness.

As Thea added, their activism and leadership involved inciting emotions in people to move and connect with them, while also providing a sense of emotional energy (i.e., hope) to mobilize them to act. In examining emotions in social movements, Jasper (1998) also demonstrated that emotions accompany social action. In the next section, I will discuss the importance of hope Thea and others mentioned.

Overall, this activist approach was more effective, as it allowed audience members like Koen (Rhubarb) to connect emotionally and empathetically to the artists, and as a result, they were more receptive to the inherent messages and teachings. As Ganz (2010) has argued, “the moral of a successful story is emotionally experienced understanding, not only conceptual understanding—a lesson of the heart, not only the head” (p. 539). As discussed in Act Four Scene Two, the artists’ performances provided an array of learning opportunities. A major tenet of leadership, particularly of social movement leadership, is that learning is imperative (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009). Thus, social movement leaders “produce organic intellectuals” (Holst, 2002, p. 85) by raising critical consciousness that provides conditions for agency and for the self-transformation of others (Freire, 1973; Mezirow, 1991b; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004), which was exactly what festival artists did.

Fostering transformation and generating a sense of hope. As discussed in Act Three Scene Two, the festivals impact on participants resulted in personal transformation that in turn generated a sense of hope. The latter was seen by participants as a trait of activism and leadership, while the former was seen more as a trait of leadership. As one artist, Peter (Rhubarb), stated, “I know that my performances have had positive impact on people and I think in that way, I am a leader in a way through my theatre.” Peter went on to recount a story about how his theatre piece resulted in an audience member gaining self-acceptance of his queer identity. Having such an impact and “providing guidance,” as Peter put it, was a trait of leadership to him. Lucas, (Rhubarb/OUTstages) an audience member, also described some artists as leaders due to the impact they had on him:

I think a leader is really anybody that provides direction. . . . They [i.e., the artists] are pointing us in some direction. . . . They are trying to make a better society and [they] had

this profound impact on me. . . . It made realize that I still have some vestiges of shame and helped me shake that off more.

Though largely absent from social movement leadership literature, a central task of social movement leaders, as other theories such as servant and transformational leadership have indicated, is consciousness-raising leading to personal transformation, growth, and the development of followers (Burns, 1978; Fairholm, 2002; Spears, 2010).

An important role of social movement activists and leaders is generating hope, as indeed hope is imperative for social movement mobilization (Aminzade & McAdam, 2012; Gould, 2009; Helland & Winston, 2005). Artists offered stories of the now by articulating the current challenges queers face, which provided a call to action narrative that there is more work to be done (Ganz, 2010). By expressing their grievances about the world, artists instilled a sense of hope that a better future for queers was possible. A postcard survey respondent from Rhubarb addressed the sense of hope generated as a result of artists expressing their grievances about the world:

The performances bring attention to issues not predominantly addressed within mainstream views of society and [issues] that are largely ignored in the queer movement. . . . [The festival] provided an opportunity to talk about these issues. . . . [And] that gives me hope that there will be change.

As activists and social movement leaders do, artists were standing up for themselves and calling for change by sharing their stories. In doing so, they educated audience members and forged emotional solidarity among queer audience members, many of whom had also faced injustice. This solidarity exemplified the popular narrative, “we are all in this together,” and it helped provide a glimpse of a world without injustice—thus, instilling a sense of hope the world could

and would change, as the postcard survey respondent noted. Implicit in the postcard response is a connection between education and hope, which several other participants also made and further linked to activism and leadership. For instance, Adela (OUTstages) stated:

History has been stumped. It's been silence. So, education is such an important and integral part . . . [of the festival] . . . Learning history about the pioneers who fought for [queers], who found their way, who were arrested for it, helps people. . . . Because [these issues are] . . . still a part of this community. People are still being silenced, and we need to learn what's still going on [in the queer community]. Education gives people knowledge and hope. There's a lot of activism and leadership in that.

ACT FIVE: THINKING, DISCUSSING, AND ANALYZING QUEERLY

My study was guided by a queer(y)ing methodology that took a queering theoretical perspective and incorporated elements of autoethnography. The question that guided this study was: How do queer theatre festivals contribute to the production of knowledge and learning, community building, and leadership and activism in the queer social movement in Canada? In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the key findings presented in the three scenes from Act Four. By thinking, discussing, and analyzing queerly, I dive deeper into the findings to illuminate their importance and relevance by showing how they relate to and expand on the literature and research questions. The discussion focuses on four overlapping areas: (a) the sociocultural significance of the theatre festivals, (b) how performance can result in performative resignification and informed citizenry that initiates social change (c) the nature of leadership and activism in social movements, and (d) whether queer theatre organizations belong to a separate social movement.

The Sociocultural Significance of Queer Theatre Festivals

A central tenant of social movements is the production of culture (Armstrong, 2002; Bruce, 2016; W. G. Roy, 2010; Shepard, 2010). Culture was taken up in this study as an umbrella term that consists of the set of values, beliefs, and meanings individuals carry; cultural products and practices (e.g., theatre, music, visual arts); and as worldviews and the social situations of communities (i.e., “a particular way of life;” Williams, 1976, p. 90). My study contributes to the growing interest in exploring the role of culture in new social movements (Amenta & Polletta, 2019; Baumgarten, Daphi, & Ullrich, 2014; Earl, 2004; Eyerman & Jamison, 1995; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995a; W. G. Roy, 2010; Shepard, 2010). Since the inception of the queer social movement, social movement organizations have employed the use

of various cultural activities, including theatre and festivals to achieve organizational goals (Shepard, 2010). According to Johnston and Klandermans (1995b), cultural activities in the queer social movement are not just shaped by culture, but also reshape it. Scholars who have studied the impact of the arts and other cultural activities have found these activities not only serve to entertain, but are also significant because they cultivate queer cultural capital, build community, provide therapeutic and healing benefits, activate hope, function as sites of celebration and politics as well as learning and personal transformation (e.g. Anderson, 2012; Clover & Craig, 2009; Eleftheriadis, 2015; Kates & Belk, 2001; Lundberg, 2007, C. Roy, 2016; Shepard, 2010; Sharpe, 2008; Van Winkle & Woosnam, 2013). My study provides further evidence of such outcomes and expands our understanding of them.

Cultivating Queer Cultural Forms of Capital: The Addition of Intersectional Capital

My research found that by promoting and providing opportunities for festivalgoers to engage in and learn about queer culture and queer ways of being, the queer theatre festivals constituted sites of queer cultural production. The promotion and learning of queer culture at festivals is significant because as so many participants noted, queers do not have that many ways or opportunities to learn queer culture given the dominance of 'straight' stories. Festivalgoers' experiences at the festival together with opportunities to learn about queer histories, gender identity and sexuality and associated labels, gender and sexual fluidity, drag, queer intersectionalities, current and ongoing queer issues, and homonormative hegemony (e.g., hypermasculinity, cultivated queer cultural capital. Drawing on Pennell (2016) who expanded on Yosso's (2005) forms of cultural capital, evidence from my study indicates the festivals cultivated the development of aspirational, linguistic, familial, resistance, and transgressive forms of queer cultural capital. There was no evidence of the development of navigational capital

in the form of specific skills and abilities needed to maneuver through institutions not created with queers in mind (Yosso, 2005). In addition, however, the findings from this study posit a new form of cultural capital—*intersectional capital*—exists and was cultivated at the festivals.

Aspirational capital. Aspiration capital refers to the ability to hold onto hope for an improved future (Pennell, 2016). The festivals were found to be utopic liminal spaces that built “hopes and dreams” (Jenni, PWG). Hope is significant because it serves as a motivating force for individuals to act. As Freire (2006) argued, “without hope there is little we can do” (p. 3). Due to its significance as a cultural outcome of the festivals, I provide a detailed discussion on hope in the “Culture a Culture of Hope” section of this act.

Linguistic capital. In regard to linguistic capital, the festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to learn new queer language (e.g., identity and sexuality labels). In addition to verbal signifiers, the festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to learn of nonverbal forms of queer language such as visual and physical cues. The development of verbal and nonverbal queer language is significant because it allows “individuals to describe themselves . . . to express desire,” and “serve[s] as signifiers to others, serving as a form of queer cultural capital individuals can draw from” (Pennell, 2016, p. 327). Access to the queer bodies of difference at the festivals challenged festivalgoers’ normative assumptions about gender and sexuality. This challenge resulted in the development of nonnormative views of gender and sexuality. For instance, Mitchell’s (Rhubarb) assumptions were challenged when he realized someone was a woman and not a man as they expected based on their visual appearance. I too—as I will discuss—was challenged when I assumed someone was straight because they were showing affection toward a woman.

Familial capital. Familial capital refers to the communal bonds between individuals (i.e., kinship ties that encompass traditional understandings of family and a broad understanding of chosen families) and their shared histories and community memories (Pennell, 2016; Yosso, 2005). The festivals nurtured a sense of queer community by providing festivalgoers with a space where queer identities were celebrated and respected, and where they felt part of a larger “chosen family” (Tobby, OUTstages). Festivalgoers formed bonds with one another by collectively reflecting on performances, sharing personal stories with one another, forming sexual relationships, and by simply participating in the social experience. The development of such bonds between different queer communities led to the development of an intersectional sense of queer community.

The festivals also fostered familial capital by providing opportunities for festivalgoers to share and learn about queer history and community memories. Kubal and Becerra (2014) have discussed the important role social movements play in the construction of collective memory, which is part of familial capital. According to Kubal and Becerra, “collective memories are shared ideas about the past” (p. 865). Several performances at the festivals served to construct collective memories by educating and reminding festivalgoers of past struggles and successes. The underlying messages and themes of several festival performances also challenged memories that were misleading and have even become “problematic myth[s]” (Kubal & Becerra, 2014, p. 869) in the queer community. For instance, some scholars and members of the queer community wrongly claim the Stonewall Riots were the beginning of the gay rights movement and have whitewashed the riots by largely ignoring the contribution of trans and people of colour (Abelove, 2015; Jagose, 1996; Sopelsa & Hurtado, 2019). History of the queer movement as a whole has been male whitewashed by privileging historical accounts by gay White men (Muñoz,

2009), and media such as the movie *Stonewall* perpetuate this claim.²⁸ Performances documenting past experiences of trans, two-spirit, Indigenous queers, and queers of colour at the festivals, however, work to circumvent these myths.

I and some activists I have worked with believe an overemphasis on celebrating the legal victories won by queer people is problematic as this overemphasis fuels a collective myth that liberation has been achieved for all queers (see Kapur, 2018). Though several performances at the festivals highlighted legal victories and other successes, many performances also illustrated the lack of freedom that truly exists. As Yian (Rhubarb) explained,

The plays highlight that as much as we have our rights and freedoms . . . we still face backlash and there's still a lot of work that needs to be done socially. . . . Like in terms of trans rights and the racism towards queer people of colour and Indigenous folks.

Such performances thus succeed in quashing the myth that our activist work as a community is complete and that legal victories are the sole way toward achieving freedom.

Resistance capital. The festivals were indeed sites that cultivated resistance capital—particularly, resistance to queerphobia—but also other forms of oppression and inequality such as racism and misogyny. The inclusive, social, safe, and experimental festivals spaces together with the underlying messages of the performances instilled a sense of worthiness in festivalgoers and motivated them to resist hegemonic culture by fully embodying their vulnerably and queer authentic selves. Further, the stories told by performers and shared by other festivalgoers provided cultural knowledge about the structures of society that oppress queers. This cultural knowledge raises critical consciousness that fuels resistance and has the potential to result in personal transformation. Learning about or remembering past queer struggles also generated

²⁸ My opinion that the *Stonewall* movie has whitewashed the Stonewall Riots is supported by others. For reviews of the movie visit the Rotten Tomatoes website (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/stonewall_2015).

resistance capital because festivalgoers realized or remembered how society has progressed, which instilled a sense of hope that further change is possible.

Transgressive capital. Related to resistant capital is transgressive capital; however, transgressive capital goes beyond efforts of simply trying to stop or to fight against someone or something (Pennell, 2016). According to Pennell (2016), transgressive capital “indicates the ways in which communities (queer or other minoritized groups) proactively challenge and move beyond boundaries that limit and bind them [e.g., sexuality and gender binaries]” (p. 329). The festivals enhanced the agency of festivalgoers by providing opportunities for festivalgoers to “step outside their more routinized identities and engage in unregulated forms of behaviour” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 11). These acts challenge and transgress normative views of sexuality and gender identity. “Creative boundary play” (Pennell, 2016, p. 329) allowed festivalgoers to create their own realities and motivated and inspired them to continue living their authentic queer selves outside of the festival spaces. As Huizinga (2002) noted, “a play-community generally tends to become permanent even after the game is over” (p. 12).

Intersectional capital. Based on the findings from this study, intersectional capital is another form of queer cultural capital developed at the festivals. I define intersectional capital as the awareness of—and intellectual ability to understand and recognize—the multiple structures of society (e.g., sexuality, race/ethnicity, gender, class, socioeconomic status) and their interactions that lead to oppression and injustice. Greater awareness of the multiple layers of oppression queer community members face is achieved when individuals and queer organizations run by these individuals acquire intersectional capital. The value of this form of capital is it provides a holistic view to solving societal issues, which yields the potential to create change for a wider range of queer individuals. Without doing so, we will fail to fully liberate all

queers. Another benefit is that by accruing intersectional capital, we amass greater understandings of one another, which has the potential to result in richer, stronger connections, and a greater queer sense of queer community—a sense of community that is much more intersectional

Community Building: Development of an Intersectional Senses of Queer Community

Festivalgoers articulated the sense of community developed at the festival by describing the spaces as a figurative home, second home, family, or chosen family—a safe space where they can just be/long. As others have argued, a sense of community is a correlate of social capital, and jointly, they provide the “glue” that holds community together (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Pooley, Cohen, & Pike, 2005). Driving this outcome was the fact that festival spaces were safe(r); achieved inclusion through an intersectional lens; provided opportunities for festivalgoers to connect authentically, culturally, emotionally (i.e., affective bonding), empathetically, and sexually; and elevated collective self-esteem.²⁹

Until this point, I have described the festivals as safe spaces because this was the word used by participants to describe the festival spaces. In generalizing the festival spaces, however, I believe it is more appropriate to conceptualize festivals as safe(r) spaces. The feeling of safety is a personal construct, and the process of creating a safe space is an ongoing task. In fact, one participant (Riley, Rhubarb) did not feel completely safe during their first two days at the festival. Though it was difficult for Riley to pinpoint the exact reasons for feeling a lack of safety, it was articulated as uncomfortable and disconnected. Feeling safe in festival spaces thus stemmed from festivalgoers being able to perform and embody their vulnerable and authentic queer selves (i.e., feeling comfortable) and from feelings of connection. However, the ability to

²⁹ Collective self-esteem is understood here as one’s perceived feelings of worthiness as members of a community (Luhtanen & Croker, 1992).

be their vulnerable and authentic queer selves and feeling connected was intertwined with the intersectional space and a sense of worthiness.

The inclusion and celebration of queer intersectional subjectivities at the festivals stood in sharp contrast to other spaces where queers gather that are less fluid and often attract a specific queer identity. As previously noted, gay and lesbian bars and Pride events tend to be privileged spaces dominated by White, middle-class, gay men and lesbian women (Engel, 2001; Hartless, 2018; Holt & Griffin, 2003; J. Taylor, 2008; Ward, 2003). Hegemonic neoliberal and heteronormative discourse have placed people in a symbolic hierarchical set of relations based on gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, and socioeconomic status (Anthias, 2014; Jewkes et al., 2015), resulting in an overshadowing and suppression of more marginalized queers. The festivals, however, are radical spaces choosing to operate from the margin rather than the centre (hooks, 1989, 2000). That is, the festivals privilege the perspectives of queers who are also people of colour, women, Indigenous, trans, older, bisexuals, immigrants, and economically disadvantaged, while still inclusive to White, middle class queers.

In elevating queer voices at the margin, the festivals attract a diverse range of queers. These “bodies of difference” (Dolan, 1993, p. 418) in the festival spaces mark a further shift away from White middle class bodies and stories (and more so men) that have been traditionally privileged. The result of the intersectional spaces is the construction of a queer collective identity that is much more intersectional and an intersectional sense of queer community. This diversity enhanced opportunities for learning that further developed the intersectional collective identity and intersectional sense of queer community at the festivals.

Therapeutic and Healing Benefits: Overcoming Queer Shame and Identity Development

This study provides another example of the therapeutic and healing benefits of the arts, specifically, that theatre can provide. The festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to hear stories similar to their own, share their personal stories, and to be seen. This allowed festivalgoers to recall memories, share personal feelings, explore and release their emotions, achieve catharsis, and to bond with others in the process—all of which can result in healing (Reclam, 2018). Of particular importance, the festivals fostered queer identity development for some festivalgoers. For other festivalgoers, the festivals nurtured the development of more positive views about their queer identity(ies), helping them overcome queer shame. Overcoming queer shame has been shown to result in improved personal security, sense of worthiness, self-acceptance, self-esteem, happiness, and mental health, causing individuals to embrace their queer selves and live more authentically (Kaufman & Raphael, 1996).

Building a Culture of Hope

A central power of the festivals was their ability to cultivate a sense of hope. Hope is understood as a positive feeling and motivational state about the imaginative possibilities of the future, and is expressed as a way of feeling, a way of thinking, and a way of behaving that propels people forward (Akinsola, 2001; Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012; F. Turner, 1995). Connected to a sense of hope are positive emotions, healing, agency, desire, and dreams of a better future (Akinsola, 2001; Bailis & Chipperfield, 2012; Freire, 2006; Jacobs, 2005; F. Turner, 1995). The specific type of hope generated at the festivals was that of social hope—hope for freedom, justice, equality, and liberation for queers (F. Turner, 1995). The sense of social hope cultivated at the festivals was both individual and collective. Braithwaite (2004) defined

collective hope as “a shared desire for a better society” (p. 146). My findings also show that a sense of hope can be contagious.

There were in fact several overarching factors that I would argue contributed to the development of a sense of hope. The first was the liminal nature of the festivals. The festivals temporarily suspended structures or spaces of society and offered festivalgoers a glimpse of a world that might be—one that is queerer. In addition to the festival spaces, many of the performances allowed audience members to socially imagine their way out of the present and into a new future—a “collective creation of socially imagined . . . utopias” (Prendergast, 2011, p. 59). Secondly, queer festivals are an inclusive, social, experimental, and as noted above, safe(r) spaces that provide a sense of worthiness and a space to heal and reclaim agency. A sense of hope and agency are thus intertwined, as Snyder (2002) indicated. Agency matters because when an individual or collective feels in control of their situation they are “encouraged to take a role in creating their own world, individually and collectively,” (W. A. Gamson, 1991, p. 37) which can lead to social change. In addition to this, festivalgoers felt connected in an environmental that allowed them to “break the silence” (Butterwick & Selman, 2003, p. 18) about their oppression(s) by speaking publicly. This in turn allowed for learning about or remembering past queer struggles that together with successes instilled, as already noted, provided a sense of hope that further change is possible.

Having hope is significant because it provides physiological and psychological benefits, including increased happiness, reduced stress, positive emotions, and promotes healthy behaviour (Lopez, 2013; Groopman, 2005). As Yosso (2005) argued, hope is also significant because it can function as a source of aspirational capital—a resource for personal and societal change. For hooks (2003) “hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the

forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time” (p. xiv) and this was evidenced by participants who spoke of being motivated and inspired to continue their activist work or to take up activism.

Sites of Celebration and Politics

The political nature of the carnivalesque (understood here as festivity) is often not taken seriously and has even been overlooked (Santino, 2011; Sharpe, 2008). As Santino (2011) argued, “this reflects a fundamental misreading of the porous and contingent nature of ritual and festival and, more precisely, a lack of recognition that the carnivalesque can and does overlap with seriousness of intention, direct action, or implicit social change” (p. 62). The queer theatre festivals are sites of celebration, but also are effective political stages. Though entertaining, the festival performances can be framed as social justice performances as they raised awareness of a variety of social issues and made political demands for societal change. The social issues raised at the festivals went beyond homophobia and included issues that impact queers and nonqueers (e.g., racism, transphobia, patriarchy, capitalism, and environmentalism). The political nature of the festivals has the potential to bring about wider social change, as will be discussed in the section “Initiating Social Change: Performative Resignification and Informed Citizenry.”

Pedagogical Sites: Transformative Learning and Queer Transgressions

Importantly, my study shows that festivals created a “cultural container for dialogue” (Goldbard, 2006, p. 53)—verbal and nonverbal—that gave rise to significant opportunities for critical thinking and learning and resulted in festivals being powerful pedagogical sites. As Freire (2000) argued, “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 92). Teaching and learning are performative acts (Giroux &

Shannon, 1997; hooks, 1994b). The pedagogical power of the festivals rest on the fact that the performances and festival spaces subverted normative performativity (Butler 1990, 1993; Fritsch, 2013). That is, the performances and festival spaces produced performative contradictions by failing to uphold normative views of gender, sexuality, and public spaces (e.g., nudity and sex acts in the theatre spaces).

In the traditional sense, festival spaces can be viewed as a classroom where festivalgoers are provided opportunities to “move beyond the boundaries of what they know and are familiar with to take an active part in a learning process that engages multiple ‘texts’ . . . as a path to understanding (Mackinlay, 2001, p.15). The multiple texts consisted of the visual, audio, collective dialogue and interaction, embodied, and the performing self. The festivals teach as they entertain and entertain as they teach (Weiner, 2001). As a result, the festivals operated as a community of practice and interest and a space for transformative learning.

A queer community of practice and interest: Festivals as knowledge communities. In exploring an outdoor arts festival in South East England, Comunian (2017) conceptualized the festival as a temporary community of practice for artists. The findings of my study support this conceptualization. According to Wenger (1998), “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Though the definition implies regular interaction, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) have noted membership in a community of practice can be spotty. Hansman (2001) described communities of practice as collaborative, providing a space for individuals to “learn and know what each other knows” (p. 48). Learning, however, may be the reason a community comes together or an incidental outcome (Wenger, 1998). There are three crucial elements of a community of practice: domain, community, and practice (Wenger et al., 2002). In

relation to the artistic community of practice created at the festivals, the shared domain of interest and competence is performance; the community consists of artists; and the practice is the shared repertoires, skills, ideas, and information—the specific knowledge—artists share about their craft.

The festivals fostered the development of a temporary community of practice for artists by bringing artists together for a period of time. Learning was an incidental outcome. Artists are brought together because they are performing at a festival or attended as a festivalgoer. The festivals resulted in artists learning because the experimental nature of the festivals enabled artists to take risks by experimenting with their craft. Further, artists at the festivals had opportunities to watch other performances and socialize with other artists between shows and in dressing rooms, which provided additional opportunities for the sharing and learning of artistic practices and skills. In addition, some festivals facilitated panel discussions for artists to not only cultivate connections but to provide artists with opportunities to learn from one another. For other participants, it was also the programming itself that helped foster a community of practice for artists' learning and knowledge creation. The audience too played a role in this community of practice. Many artists who were participants spoke to how they had sought feedback about their performance from audience members. This feedback provided artists with valuable information about what worked, what did not work, and whether the underlying messages of the performance were understood as artists intended.

Each festival can also be conceptualized as a community of interest, a variation of a community of practice (Fischer, 2001). Though a community of interest shares the same three crucial elements as a community of practice, a major difference is membership in a community of interest includes whoever is interested in the topic rather than just practitioners (Briard &

Carter, 2013; Fischer, 2001). This type of membership results in a more heterogeneous community (Fischer, 2001). Further, members in a community of interest may attend every event or just a single one (Briard & Carter, 2013). In understanding the festivals as a community of interest, the domain of interest at the festivals was primarily related to social justice issues. The community consisted of queers and queer allies who share an interest in social justice. The practice is the knowledge and information related to social justice issues. The informal learning that occurred as a result of this community of interest is about oneself, others, and societal issues.

Theatre festivals as sites for transformative learning: A queer perspective. One of the central theoretical problematics new social movement theorists highlight is the politics of personal transformation (Buechler, 1995; Finger, 1989; Walter, 2007). Transformative learning is a useful theory for understanding learning at the festivals. As outline in Act Three, the theatre festivals were found to be spaces that fostered personal transformation. Transformative learning occurred as a result of creating a performance, by performing in a performance and/or the festival space, through witnessing the performances, and deep socializing between festivalgoers and participation in festival events.³⁰

Y. Taylor (2009) and other scholars have indicated that the core elements essential to transformative learning are (a) individual experiences that act as “trigger events” (Raikou, 2018, p. 3) or create a disoriented dilemma; (b) dialogue; (c) critical reflection through both the mind and body (see Kreber, 2012; Lawrence, 2012; Dirkx, 2006); (d) a holistic orientation to ways of knowing (e.g., cognitive, affective, embodied; see Amann, 2003; Brinkmann, 2017; Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Clark, 2012); (e) the social context including the environment of the learning

³⁰ This idea of deep socializing and participation is borrowed from Geertz’s (1998) “deep hanging out” (p. 69) research method. Similar to Geertz, deep socializing and participation is understood as the extended immersion and participation of festivalgoers in festival events and spaces.

space and prior experiences of learners; and (f) the development of authentic relationships, empathetic connections, and a sense of community (see Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). As Y. Taylor rightfully noted, the elements that foster transformative learning “have an interdependent relationship” (p. 4). These elements were all present at the queer theatre festivals. The findings from this study provide additional insight into these elements and also suggest other elements should be considered in understanding how transformative learning is fostered.

Before discussing the additional insights and elements related to transformative learning gleaned from this study, I want to first stress it is important not to romanticize the idea that festivals and related components themselves can lead to transformation. Too often, I hear people suggest individuals have the power to go into communities and bring about transformation.³¹ I do not subscribe to this god complex. Though the festivals opened doors to the possibility of transformative learning, transformation is ultimately a personal process that comes from within. The festivalgoer has “a past and a present,” (Dewey, 1934, p. 183) and thus how they experience the theatre festivals depends on what they bring to it—their baggage, knowledge, and own embodied lived realities and storied pasts. As I indicated in Act Four, a few participants were pushed too far outside their comfort zone, which caused them to retreat and closed the door to potential learning and transformation.

Insight 1: The power of stories to elicit emotions together with the performative festival spaces foster holistic ways of learning and transformative experiences. Festivals are an “exemplary embodiment of the unity between art and education” (Freire, 2004, p. 80). The performed stories, stories shared by audience members, and performative festival spaces were

³¹ This opinion is based on my experience attending conferences, listening to presentations from classmates during my MEd and PhD programs, and from discussion with a fellow colleague, Dr. Jennifer Pemberton, who shared the same opinion.

effective educational tools because they opened up opportunities to various ways of learning. Learning at the festivals occurred in various ways, including hearing, seeing, doing/experiencing (e.g., artists creating and performing and the performance of festivalgoers themselves), reflecting, and as a result of feelings and emotions that flowed through the social experiencing body. Thus, learning did not privilege the mind over the body. As Ellsworth (2005) noted, “learning involves cognition—but never direct, unmediated cognition. Learning never takes place in the absence of bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history” (p. 55). Given people learn differently, the holistic nature in which learning occurred resulted in the theatre festivals being powerful public pedagogical learning sites and increased the potential for transformative learning. Though past discourse of adult education has privileged the reflecting mind over the body, the findings from this study reinforces calls from scholars to incorporate the reflecting body and to challenge the mind-body dualism (Fenwick, 2006; Jordi, 2011; Michelson, 1998).

Expanding on Drew’s (2017) “witness-feel-think-analyse” (p. 187) learning process, learning can be conceptualized in this study as a holistic “witness/hear/do/feel-think/reflect-analyze/transgressive” process. Like Drew’s process, this conceptualization of the learning process in this study does not separate the body from the mind nor is it sequential or linear in operation. Further, the elements of the “witness/hear/do/-feel-think/reflect-analyze/transgressive” process operate both individually and collectively. In witnessing and hearing the verbal and nonverbal (i.e., embodied) stories told during the performances and in the doing (e.g., performing their queer selves and engaging in discourse), feelings and emotions flowed through the listening body. The safe(r) festival spaces allowed festivalgoers to openly be in their emotions. Tapping into feelings and emotions provides “an opportunity for establishing a

dialogue with those unconscious aspects of ourselves” (Dirkx, 2006, p. 22). This dialogue induced festivalgoers to critically reflect and analyze their lives and the lives of others. As Y. Taylor (2009) argued, feelings and emotions “often act as a trigger for the reflective process, prompting the learner to question deeply held assumptions” (p. 11). The festival spaces also provided opportunities for festivalgoers to engage in collective dialogue, collective reflection, and analysis that resulted in further learning about themselves and others. In many instances, the dialogue between festivalgoers involved the sharing of personal stories. For many festivalgoers, the experience resulted in transgressive performances and personal transformation.

Insight 2: Establishing an intersectional sense of queer community provides greater opportunities for transformative learning. Though the transformative learning process begins with a disorienting dilemma, such a dilemma is unlikely to occur unless certain conditions in the learning environment are met (Mezirow, 2009). As discussed, the festivals were found to be inclusive, safe(r), social, and experimental spaces and fostered the development of an intersectional sense of queer community. It is unlikely transformative learning would have transpired as intensely as it did at the festivals—or at all—without these conditions. For instance, the inclusive spaces and intersectionality of queer “individuals’ experiences, ideas, values, and insights” (Cranton, 1996, p. 28) came together to stimulate dialogue, reflection, meaning making, and connection between festivalgoers, which enhanced the possibility for transformative learning. The exposure to others different from ourselves at the festivals provided an opportunity for festivalgoers to see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears a position and “a story very different from [their] own” (Biesta, 2001, p. 398). By seeing, I mean literally viewing the marked queer and storied embodied bodies and other visual elements in the festival spaces that served as a text for learning. Of course, inclusive and intersectional spaces alone would have not

resulted in creating opportunities for transformation. Festivalgoers would have likely not engaged in meaningful social interactions and established authentic relationships if they did not feel a sense of safety or have opportunities to socialize or experiment.

Some scholars have been critical of the notion of safe spaces from a community organizing and educational perspective because they argue such spaces are not effective in meeting the needs of different community members and do not promote critical thinking (see Barrett, 2010; Boostrom, 1998; Chin, 2017). In this study, however, the sense of safety provided festivalgoers a “refuge against oppression” (Chin, 2017, p. 391) and fostered critical thinking. Further, the inclusive, social, safe(r), and experimental spaces provided performers and festivalgoers with the freedom to express their views and opinions, which involved “confronting one another across differences” (hooks, 1994b, p. 113) and resulted in transformative learning.

Insight 3: Liminal spaces empower individuals to act with agency and to perform authentically. The liminal nature of the festivals was also important for initiating transformative learning. The queer spaces enabled festivalgoers to suspend social norms of the outside world and to “behave with abandonment and freedom away from the constraints of the everyday” (Pielichaty, 2015, p. 235). The ability to behave with abandonment and freedom provided an opportunity for festivalgoers to perform their vulnerable and authentic queer selves, to experiment with their identities, and openly question their beliefs and identities. Thus, the festivals were spaces that empowered festivalgoers to act with agency and contributed to identity development. The theory of sociocultural learning, which places an emphasis on the social context, suggests learning occurs best in diverse authentic environments and through the ability to fully participate in social spaces (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1997). It is thus fruitful to incorporate sociocultural learning theory into transformative learning theory.

Insight 4: The nondidactic nature of learning and hearing various viewpoints over a short period of time enhances dialogue and critical reflection. Dialogue and reflection were enhanced by the approach to which social issues were addressed at the festivals. Rather than offering concrete solutions to social issues, performers told stories that explored and questioned structures of society that oppress queers. Learning at the festivals was thus not a didactic, banking system of education,³² which is part and parcel to neoliberalism (Espinoza, 2017; Torres, 2017). As Jose (Rhubarb) noted, the nondidactic approach was successful at promoting individual and collective dialogue and reflection. As I previously alluded, this approach to teaching also resulted in emotional responses and empathy, both of which are important for facilitating transformative learning (Dirkx, 2006; E. W. Taylor, 2001).

The theatre festivals are unique because they provided festivalgoers with the opportunity to attend multiple performances and events, which the majority of attendees did. The opportunity to attend multiple performances allowed festivalgoers in a short time period to hear from, and interact with, diverse queers with various experiences. This permitted festivalgoers to compare and contrast different lived realities that further promoted dialogue and reflection, as Jose (Rhubarb) also noted.

Insight 5: A disorienting dilemma need not result from a significant or dramatic life event. The catalyst to transformative learning is a disorienting dilemma that leads to critical reflection and then to perspective transformation of taken-for-granted meanings (Mezirow, 1991a). Though traditionally and commonly thought of as arising from a dramatic personal event or life crisis (Laros, 2017; Laros, Fuhr, & Taylor, 2017; Mezirow, 1991a), views have shifted to understand that disorientation can occur incrementally (Daloz, 2000; Laros, 2017, Nohl, 2015) or

³²The banking concept of education is a method of teaching whereby learners, who are considered to know nothing, simply store information relayed to them by “those who consider themselves knowledgeable” (Freire, 2000, p. 72).

“could come gradually” (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 177). The findings in this study provide further support of this latter understanding of a disorienting dilemma.

Influenced by heteronormative hegemony, many queers are not immediately aware of their gender and/or sexuality and others who are aware may suppress their true gender and sexuality by living in the proverbial closet. Bilodeau and Renn (2005) indicated that identity transformation does not usually occur from a single event, but rather a series of life events. Rather than having an abrupt epiphany, several participants noted that as a result of their experiences at the festivals they had begun the process of shifting their understanding of their sexuality and/or gender. For example, as a result of learning about—and because of her exposure to other genders and sexual identities at Pretty Witty and GAY!—Blair (PWG) realized a disequilibrium with her identity and indicated she had begun to see herself as pansexual. Her dilemma—as with other participants who experienced transformative learning—operated as an “aha moment.” Similarly, several participants spoke about how the festivals had “kick-started” the process of coming out of queer shame and transforming this shame into queer pride. Thus, as Pope (1996) argued, transformation occurs “more like an unfolding revolution rather than a [direct] response to a crisis” (as cited in Laros, 2017, p. 87).

Insight 6: A disorienting dilemma and transformation in general does not necessarily result in a stable outcome. Understanding a disorienting dilemma and transformative learning as a stable outcome is problematic. If we take queer theory seriously, identities (gender and sexuality) are much more unstable and fluid (J. Gamson, 1995). For many queers, identities can take on many transformations through time. As we learn about different sexualities and genders and are exposed to others like our future selves, new understandings of our own sexuality and gender may arise. Blair (PWG), for instance, was convinced she was bisexual until she learned

about, and was exposed to, individuals who identified as pansexual. Further, identity reversions are also possible, as the following personal reflection from my research journal highlights:

February 17, 2018: Am I gay? Tonight, at Rhubarb, I met this beautiful, tattooed, nose-pierced man. I noticed him when he sat down in the row in front of me. He was with a woman [yes, my assumption at first, but this was later confirmed] who—might I add—was just as beautiful. . . . I assumed they were straight as they were holding hands [“aha,” yes, I am still trying to dismantle my own heteronormative assumptions]. . . . Following the performance [*Chicho*], I was in line at the bar and he was behind me. While waiting to be served, we ended up chatting about the performance. After grabbing our drinks, we continued our conversation with [his female partner]. . . . The three of us really connected and ended up going out for another drink at O’Grady’s [a local pub on Church Street]. We talked about a number of things . . . but what intrigued me was he identified as bisexual and still has sex with men. . . . As I got to know him more, I saw myself in him due to our similar interests but also because of our sexual identity development. . . . Like him, when I initially came out of the closet, I came out as bisexual. Although, also like him, I only dated and had sexual relationships with men. Both of us eventually came out as gay. Two years ago, however, he reverted to identifying as bisexual. When I learned this, I talked openly about how I still find women attractive and fanaticize about them. . . . This experience resulted in an “aha moment.” Maybe I am actually bisexual too?

I—like many others who border the boundaries between the binary notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality—have been challenged by the social construct that being gay must imply I am only into men. When I initially came out as bisexual, my friends would often say to me, “it is just a phase,” and the lack of a frame of reference to challenge this frame

resulted in me believing what they said. Though I have met others in the past who identified as bisexual—and my desire for sexual relationships with women has ebbed and flowed through time—this social interaction at Rhubarb helped solidify my identity. As a result, I have started to identify as queer to recognize my bisexuality and acknowledge the instability of my sexuality. This personal experience illustrates the complexity of transformative learning experiences and highlights the necessity to understand transformation and transformative learning as a continual and unstable process. This revelation also illustrates the power of qualitative research to personally impact and transform the researcher.

Insight 7: A discourse of hope acts as a transformative force. This study provides evidence that a discourse of hope acts as a transformative force. Hence, creating spaces of hope fuels the possibilities for transformative learning. Feeling hopeful is significant because it increases confidence and provides a sense of agency, which results in and encourages individuals to change their behaviour (Lopez, 2013; Yosso, 2005). For example, a sense of hope empowered several festivalgoers to come out of the closet and/or express their queer identities more truthfully. Hope that future change is possible was also transformative in that it motivated and inspired several participants to continue their activist work and others to become or desire to become agents of change.

Initiating Social Change: Performative Resignification and Informed Citizenry

Queer theatre festivals can be viewed as intentional cultural practice that can serve as a “tactical repertoire” (Taylor, Kimport, Van Dyke, & Andersen, 2009, p. 867) for creating an intersectional sense of queer community; bringing attention to queer social movement issues; framing political debates; fostering agency for queers to behave their vulnerable and queer authentic selves; and (re)shaping opinions, beliefs, and values. Though the festivals themselves

are important social movement strategies and effective tactics (Earl, 2004; Juris, 2014) for achieving such outcomes, the question remains as to whether these outcomes can result in changes to greater society. Indeed, the festivals alone “are not sufficient to bring about social change” (Juris, 2014, p. 244). In fact, a few participants acknowledged this belief. Miguel (Rhubarb) explained, “while I would like to think and hope that a play is going to change a law and society, I know that isn’t realistic.” However, as a result of the performative (in the performance rather than performativity sense) and pedagogical nature of the festivals, the festivals were found to be a steppingstone toward social change.

By providing spaces whereby queers can perform their vulnerable and queer authentic selves, or “moments of truth” as Conlon (2004, p. 465) referred to such acts, the festivals were spaces that gave rise to subversive acts of performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993). Particularly, the festivals provided an opportunity for festivalgoers to resist hegemonic gender and sexuality norms. Failing to perform socially prescribed or normative notions of gender and sexuality are “politically radical” (M. Morris, 2000, p. 16) acts that seek to destabilize performative iterations of sexuality and gender and give rise to performative resignification (Butler, 1990, 1993). As Butler (1990) indicated: “The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found . . . in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (p. 141). Indeed, as the findings from this study indicate, normative notions of gender and sexuality were challenged. Further, the festivals inspired and motivated festivalgoers to live their vulnerable and authentic queer selves in society. In doing so, festivalgoers become agents of change and continue to challenge dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality outside of festival spaces. If there is “no performativity without performance” (Langellier & Peterson, 2006, p. 155), then we cannot

overlook the power of individual agency to shift their performance and hence performativity as other scholars have noted (Bickell, 2005; Crawley, 2008; Nussbaum, 1999).

In addition to living their vulnerable and authentic selves, the festivals served as a steppingstone for social changes as a result of the ability for festivalgoers to share stories of oppression, express anger about current injustices, and make demands for social change. This resulted in emotional reactions (including sympathy and anger), invoked empathy in festivalgoers, and resulted in learning about queer and other social issues. Such learning fosters the development of a more informed citizenry—a precursor for active citizenship and a “kick-starter” for the social change process. In fact, several participants discussed how the festivals helped to inform their activism.

As previously noted, in many cases the learning resulted in personal transformation. Though transformative learning privileges individual over social transformation, alterations in how we live and understand the world (individual transformation) is a contributing factor leading to social transformation (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015; Finger, 1989). As a postcard survey respondent from OUTstages explained, the festivals “change us personally” and this has as “a ripple effect” on society. In addition to personal transformations, the emotions and empathy elicited in festivalgoers also acted as powerful forces in motivating festivalgoers to take action to address injustices.

Though anger is often viewed as destructive and is used as justification for silencing marginalized communities that speak up (e.g., belittling activists by saying “they are just angry queers, queens, women, or bitches”) by making them seem crazy, irrational, and evil, it is a vital catalyst for change when approached with conscious intention (Chemaly, 2018). Participants spoke about anger as a motivating force to take action to bring about social change. However,

anger alone can be inhibiting (Jasper, 1998; Wlodarczyk, Basabe, Páez, & Zumeta, 2017). Yet, when emotions of anger and hope collide, the motivation to act is heightened (Wlodarczyk, Basabe, Páez, & Zumeta, 2017). As Ahmed (2004) stated, “hope is what allows us to feel that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible” (p. 184).

Though a longitudinal analysis is required to fully understand the long-term or lasting the festivals have, the findings from this study provide evidence festivalgoers had begun or intended to change their attitudes and behaviour. It is what one does with this new knowledge and awareness—in the doing—that social change happens. In other words, personal behaviour is of political significance in terms of bringing about social change. Changes in attitudes and behaviours consisted of festivalgoers (a) becoming stronger allies to communities other than their own, (b) being more vocal about social issues, (c) starting to call out prejudice when they see it, (d) stepping up their activist work, and of course (e) living out their authentic queer selves as discussed above. In addition to changes in attitudes and behaviour, the festivals are also increasing the visibility of the queer community, which has the power to shift public opinions of queer people.

Revisioning Leadership and Activism

In this section, I summarize the findings related to leadership and activism and discuss the insights and theoretical possibilities gleaned from these findings. As noted in Act Two, literature on social movement leadership has focused primarily on visible formal leadership positions in social movement organizations and has been heavily influenced by Weber’s (Year) concept of charismatic leadership (e.g., Couto, 1993; Eichler, 1977; Herda-Rapp, 1998; Morgan, 2006; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). Findings from my study do not subscribe to this view, and I distinguish between formal and informal leaders (associated or unassociated with an

organization) to correct the “lopsided conceptualization of leadership” (Herda-Rapp, 1998, p. 341). My study in fact illustrates DeCesare’s (2013) argument that “some of the most consequential figures in human history did not belong to any formal group, either as a leader or as a member” (pp. 253–254).

Festival Organizers as Queer Cultural Leaders-Activist

All participants classified the primary festival organizers as leaders. Due to their positions in their respective organizations, which gave them formal authority over the direction and vision of their organizations, primary festival organizers are formal leaders.

Interestingly, only a few participants identified festival organizers as activists. This result puzzled me. How was it someone working in the realm of the queer social movement could be considered a leader and not also an activist? Unfortunately, it was not until after exiting the field this mystification emerged. As I dug further into the literature on social movements, I realized largely absent was how leadership connected to activism and vice versa. Possibly, this connection has been ignored in social movement literature because it is obvious social movement leaders must also be activists. However, I did find research in other areas—mainly in research focusing on political/public leaders—that theorized some leaders as also activists (Dorius & McCarthy, 2011; Greenstein, 1980; Martin, Williams, Green, & Smith, 2019; McCrimmon, 2010; Oke, 2018; Ware, 1992). Despite only a few participants classifying festival organizers as activists, I conceptualized festival organizers as *queer cultural activist-leaders*. The term recognizes that while festival organizers are leaders, their work is also activism because they attempt to bring about social change through a focus on queer cultural production. The hyphen recognizes the interdependent relationship that exists between being a social movement activist and leader.

Intersectional Leadership

Of particular interest to the findings on festival organizers as leaders is that organizers have embraced an intersectional leadership lens. This finding provides an opportunity to offer a new theory of leadership: *intersectional leadership*. The queer social movement has been critiqued by activists for lacking an intersectional perspective, as the voices and experiences of marginalized queers (e.g., queers who are trans, two-spirit, Indigenous, of colour, and immigrants) have largely been silenced (Labelle, 2019). Intersectional leadership is related to inclusive leadership, but there is value in separating the two. Inclusive leadership emphasizes diversity, strives for inclusion, and seeks to ensure all individuals and groups feel safe; are valued, respected, and treated fairly; and have opportunities to meaningfully participate (Hollander, 2009; Ryan, 2006). Intersectional leadership takes inclusion—which is traditionally focused on a “single-axis framework” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139) of identity difference—to the next level by promoting and incorporating an intersectional sensibility. Thus, intersectional leaders embrace diversity and inclusion by leading through an intersectional lens, resulting in the creation of spaces that are intersectional. Particularly related to leadership in the queer social movement, an intersectional leadership approach recognizes, understands, and makes clear that queerphobia alone does not explain the oppression of queers. When intersectional leaders acknowledge and understand multiple forms of oppression, they create spaces that are much more intersectional. An intersectional leadership approach is of significance given some queer social movement organizations have not taken an intersectional perspective and we have witnessed fragmentation between queer communities and queer social movement organizations (Chaffe, 2014). An intersectional leadership perspective within the queer social movement can

mitigate further fractures and even rebuild connections to achieve a larger collective network.

Crenshaw (2015) is in agreement with this view:

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power . . . [and] the better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture. (para. 5–7)

Artist-Leaders

The majority of participants saw the work of artists as activism given their art addressed social issues and made political demands that attempted to move people into new understandings of themselves and of the world. However, some were also seen as leaders. Specifically, they are informal “autonomous movement leader[s]” (Herda-Rapp, 1998, p. 341) because their work as artists at the festivals was unassociated with any official social movement organization. Due to the blurring between activists and leaders, I classified performers as *artist-leaders*. *Artist* describes artists who use their art for activist purposes. *Artist-leaders* are thus those whose identity includes artist, activist, and leader (see Figure 11). This is not to suggest all artists producing queer work can be conceptualized as both activists and leaders. Some artists are just artists (e.g., a queer artist who does not produce queer political art) and others just activists (i.e., they do not take up leadership functions). The conceptualization of artists as *artist-leaders* and festival organizers as queer cultural leaders-activists provides insights into the differences between social movement activist and leaders, which I discuss next.

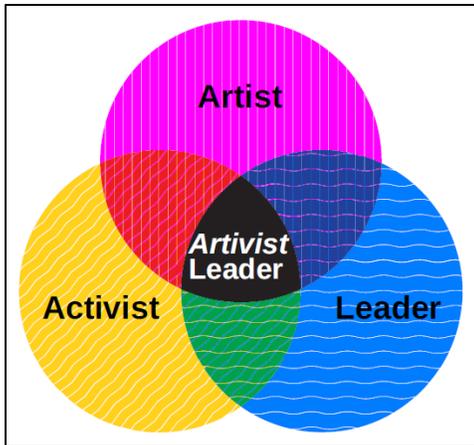


Figure 11. The intersection between artist, activist, and leader.

The Difference Between Leadership and Activism

There is significant overlap between what social movement activists and leaders do, as findings from this study indicate. Both activists and leaders seek to bring about social change, raise awareness of social issues affecting queers, promote queer culture, generate hope, are trailblazers who take risks, and foster transformation in individuals and society as a whole. The findings from this study, together with other research on leadership, provide a possible framework to understand the primary differences between social movement leaders and activists. Namely, queer social movement leaders—unlike sole activists—(a) mobilize others to join the movement and become agents of change (Gordon, 2002; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Reger, 2007b); (b) help construct a queer collective identity and a sense of community (Ganz, 2010; Melucci, 1995; Polletta & Jasper, 2001); (c) and serve as movement spokespersons who articulate movement frames and narratives that drive the foci of the movement (Benford & Snow, 2000; Couto, 1993; Eichler, 1977; Ganz, 2010; Gusfield, 1966). This framework does not imply that to be a social movement leader one needs to take on all of these functions. Rather, I agree with Rucht (2012) that in social movements there are many leaders “who co-exist” (p. 114) and who may fulfill one or more functions. This

conceptualization requires further analysis and scrutiny but serves as a useful framework for starting to understand the key differences between social movement leaders and activists—a distinction that is lacking in current literature.

Queer Theatre Organizations: Do They Belong to a Separate Movement?

There is a growing view expressed by some scholars that organizations that prioritize queer individuals with multiple identities and take a multi-issue perspective represent a new social movement distinct from dominant mainstream organizations (DeFilippis, 2018; Forbes & Ueno, 2019; Gandy-Guedes & Pacey, 2019). DeFilippis (2015, 2018)—whose theorization other scholars have embraced (see Forbes & Uno, 2019; Gandy-Guedes & Pacey, 2019)—postulated a separate queer liberation movement (QLM) existed and was distinct from the dominant mainstream gay rights movement (GRM). According to DeFilippis (2018), “the GRM has employed a laser-sharp focus on combatting homophobic discrimination, making it not merely its primary goal, but its solitary goal” (p. 64). Further, organizations in the GRM simply seek to gain “access for LGBTQ people to social institutions” rather than attempting to “overhaul or dismantle” them (p. 69). As DeFilippis (2015) indicated, homonormativity characterizes organizations working within the GRM. On the other hand, QLM organizations are “actively organized around intersectional, multi-issue interests,” centre their work around the “interests of the most marginal queer communities,” and are focused on transforming social institutions (DeFilippis, 2018, p. 65).

Based on findings from this study alone, it would be convenient to theorize the organizations producing queer theatre festivals in Canada as QLM organizations. The queer theatre festival organizations take intersectionality seriously by placing an emphasis on voices and stories from “more marginalized individuals within the queer” (Gandy-Guedes & Pacey,

2019, p. 440) community such as queers of colour, trans, Indigenous queers, two-spirit individuals, and queers with disabilities. Further, the issues addressed at the queer theatre festival go well beyond homophonic discrimination and include issues such as race, social class, gender, socioeconomic status, capitalism, immigration, environmentalism, and misogyny. These broad issues affect not only queers, but also nonqueers. The focus and agenda of the theatre organizations is in contrast to traditional mainstream movement organizations such as those producing Pride festivals in Canada that have lacked an intersectional perspective because they have privileged White middle-class able-bodied gay men and lesbians; have relegated people of colour, trans, Indigenous, and the economically disadvantaged; can be theorized as being homonormative; and have largely held an equality-based agenda (Benn, 2017; Chaffe, 2014; Greensmith & Giwa, 2013; Greey, 2018; Marshall, 2017; Smith, 1998, 1999).

If we consider the findings of this study together with a historical perspective and literature of social movements, I am reluctant to make the claim that queer theatre organizations are part of a separate social movement. My reluctance to do so stems from four primary concerns. First, in theorizing social movements, it is necessary to explore a movement's continuity and history (Bernstein, 2002; V. Taylor, 1989). For instance, *Buddies in Bad Times Theatre* has had a contested history in terms of the individuals and work it has presented (Halferty, 2006). In its early stages of development, the company classified itself as a gay and lesbian theatre company and was driven by a homophobic political agenda (Gilbert, 2014). As I have argued in this study, the organization—as evident by the *Rhubarb* festival—currently employs a multi-issue and queer intersectional focus. Thus, in its earlier stages of development, *Buddies in Bad Times Theatre* would align more with an organization operating within the GRM

due to Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's neglect for "multiple intersections of oppression affecting queer communities" (DeFilippis, 2018, p. 67).

Conceptualizing two separate social movements thus ignores the potential for the transformation of social movement organizations and the movement itself. Social movement organizations work in the social sphere, and their structures, objectives, ideologies, beliefs, and tactics are thus influenced and transformed by (a) changes in social movement membership and the identity and desires of these members (internal forces); (b) societal changes (external forces; e.g., the HIV/AIDS crisis); and (c) the presence of other organizations new and old operating within the social movement (internal forces; Benford & Snow, 2000; Bernstein, 1997; Diani & Bison, 2004; Fuchs, 2006; Ghaziani, Taylor, & Stone, 2016; Willems & Jegers, 2012; Zald & Ash, 1966; Zald & McCarthy, 1980). As Diani and Bison (2004) argued, "'collective identity' does not imply homogeneity of ideas and orientations within social movement networks" (p. 9). Rather, the "social construction of collective identity is an ongoing, never-completed task in social movements" (Buechler, 1993, p. 229). Though a full review was outside the scope of this study, mainstream organizations such as organizations producing Pride festivals, of which I have been a member of, have as a result of internal and external forces begun to embrace a more intersectional, multi-issued perspective. A few examples are as follows:

- As a result of backlash from queer intersectional communities and other organizations, Pride Winnipeg issued a public apology in 2016 about being an exclusive organization and took actions to be more inclusive to queers of colour, trans individuals, queers with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged queers (Beaudette, 2016).

- Antiracist queer activists have rightfully pushed back against police inclusion in queer spaces such as Pride parades, as their presence is threatening and exclusionary to marginalized queers (e.g., Black, Indigenous, Latinx, trans individuals, socioeconomically disadvantaged queers). As a result, Pride organizations across the country, including Victoria Pride, have banned police from marching in Pride parades in uniform or completely (Watson, 2019). Other organizations such as Vancouver Pride have amplified calls from Black Lives Matter to defund police (National Post, 2020).
- Pride organizations have attempted to become more intersectional by hiring queers with intersecting identities and by creating new committees. In 2017, Pride Toronto hired for the first time a Black female executive director (Bascaramurty, 2017); and this year, Capital Pride in Ottawa hired an executive director (its first ever) who identifies as an Afro-Latino cisgender queer man (Capital Pride, 2020). Also, this year, Pride Toronto started a committee to address anti-Black racism in the organization (Pride Toronto, 2020).

This is not to suggest the work to become more multi-issued focus and intersectional is complete, as mainstream Pride organizations still have much work to do. Nevertheless, they are operating more like what DeFilippis calls QLM organizations than they previously were.

The second reason for my reluctance to argue queer theatre organizations are part of a separate movement is doing so suggests social movement organizations cannot coexist in tension or in conflict with one another. Unique to the queer social movement is there is no single charismatic leader or dominant organization. It is thus naive to think all social movement organizations in a single movement are homogenous and that they all share the same goals,

ideologies, collective identities, and approaches on how to operate the movement (Diani & Bison, 2004; Koustova, Kwantes, Thrasher, & Fernando, 2014; Zald & McCarthy, 1980). Rather, a “wide spectrum of different conceptions may be present, and factional conflicts may arise at any time” (Diani & Bison, 2004, p. 9) between movement organizations. In fact, as social movement scholars have noted, intramovement conflict and the existence of more radical organizations in a social movement are common (Armstrong, 2005; Diani & Bison, 2004; Zald & McCarthy, 1980). Though radical and nonradical social movement organizations may be “distinct enough to work independently,” there can also exist “enough potential areas of convergence to render cross-sector alliances [or loose networks] a feasible option” (Diani & Bison, 2004, p. 289). For instance, social movement organizations despite being in conflict with one another may be linked by specific ties such as through overlapping members; joint participation in specific events; access to similar resources; spontaneous informal alliances driven by external factors or political opportunities; or by mutually influencing organizational and movement objectives, goals, and beliefs (Armstrong, 2005; Benford & Snow, 2000; Diani & Bison, 2004; Zald & McCarthy, 1980).

As I found in this study, queer theatre festival organizations remain loosely connected to Pride organizations that operate in their respective cities. If social movements are conceived as networks (be it dense or sparse and formal or informal)—as I have—then alternative organizations can coexist in the same movement. Armstrong (2005), who created a database of all queer organizations in San Francisco from 1950 to 1994, discussed how the movement transformed through time from a focus on liberational organizations that sought to transform society (e.g., sought to overthrow capitalism; wanted sexual liberation for all, not just gays; and strived to eliminate sexual identities), to gay rights. The “crystallization” (Armstrong, 2005, p.

169) of the movement in the 1970s to a focus on rights occurred as a result of a “collision” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 161) between the liberation and equality-based organizations.³³ Thus, tension in the queer movement between different social movement organizations has existed in the past. By ignoring tensions, is to fail to fully understand “how collective identities are formed, political demands are formulated, internal conflicts are managed, and alliances are built and maintained” (Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016, p. 2). In current times, and as evidenced by queer theatre organizations and other more multifocused intersectional organizations, it appears the movement is shifting back toward a liberation focus. The separation of the movement into two distinct movements thus ignores the possibilities for resignification and change and the “resolution of internal movement struggles” (Bernstein, 2002, p. 568). As Armstrong (2002) argued, movement “evolution is not a tale of a smooth, gradual development” (p. 1).

Third, separating the movement into two movements ignores the important work of equality-based organizations. In many ways, these organizations have laid the groundwork and paved the way for other new multi-issue, intersectional organizations to emerge and survive. As social movement scholars have indicated, initial movement organizations provide preexisting networks for recruitment, resources, and have established social and cultural capital new organizations can draw on (Diani, 1997; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Zald & McCarthy, 1980).

My final reluctance for suggesting two separate movements exist, which is related to the first three reasons, stems from an operational and structural perspective. Specifically, such a framing exacerbates division and romanticizes stability in the movement. Separating the

³³ Another example of organizations coexisting with tension and differing objectives in a single social movement is the environmental movement. In analyzing the environmental movement, Hoffman (2009) created a network map between different organizations and argued that shifting perspectives led to an array of organizational types, some which were more radical than others and existed in tension with other organizations. The result has been a scattering of different types of organizations, each with its own unique goals, tactics, and varying degrees of focus.

movement into two movements creates an “us versus them” ideology between social movement organizations and encourages division and further factions. A more fruitful path forward would be to shift this conceptualization to an inclusive “we’re all in this together”—a phrase used by several participants in this study. By working through an inclusive perspective, we are “motivated less by drawing boundaries” between different groups “and more by building bridges” (Ghaziani, 2011, p. 117), and we will recognize the potential for activists and organizations to learn from one another. In fact, a bridging between social movement organizations is currently taking place. Following the death of George Floyd, queer organizations (including QRM and GRM organizations as per DeFilippis’ classification) across Canada have come together in solidarity to protest racial violence and injustice. All families fight at times, and not all family members get along, yet they are still family and they are generally stronger together. From the trials and tribulations, we can learn, grow, and transform individually and our organizations and society. By conceptualizing the differing organizations—despite being tenuous at times—as a network that forms a single social movement community (Buechler, 1990), it better captures the full range of queer organizations that exist and their various levels of foci. Further, the inclusive “we’re all in this together” conceptualization recognizes that movements are not territorial but rather boundary-spanning, and that movement culture is shaped, “shared[,] and developed [between] movement communities” (Staggenborg, 1998, p. 182).

My objective in this section has been to throw caution to the wind on what seems to be a growing view that two separate movements exist. All queer social movement organizations whether they focus on equality, a particular community, or take a more intersectional, multi-issue stance seek to shift culture and liberate queers in one manner or another. At this moment in time, I reject the claim that two separate movements exist and believe a more precise understanding of

the dynamics of the movement would be achieved by dividing the movement into waves, phases, or stages, as the women's/feminist social movement has (Goldin, 2006; Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006; V. Taylor, 1989). I thus suggest scholars looking into the queer social movement employ a holistic, historical, evolutionary, cultural, and macro analysis of the field before drawing conclusions. Armstrong's (2002, 2005) evolutionary analysis and approach, and Fuchs's (2006) view of social movements as self-organizing systems are useful starting points. Further, I believe a greater understanding of learning between social movement organizations is required to fully understand movement dynamics. If we genuinely believe social movements are networks, as I do, then we must incorporate organizational change and systems thinking theories into theorization of social movements.

ACT SIX: CURTAIN CALL

Seventy interview participants and 38 postcard survey respondents take to the stage to stand alongside me for a final bow. As we grip each other's hands to take our bow, thoughts, reflections, emotions, desires, and feelings flow through our bodies. We turn our attention to the audience—seeing, hearing, and feeling them. Without a beat, we in turn clap and cheer for hundreds of other festivalgoers, acknowledging they are implicit in this study, for there is no fourth wall separating our experiences.

This is the scene I imagine as I write this final act. Without the 108 individuals (70 interview participants and 38 postcard survey respondents) who shared personal experiences and stories with me and hundreds of other festivalgoers, there would be no analysis or story to tell. Together, the 109 participants (including myself) made sense of, and gave meaning to, queer theatre festivals. In this final act, I describe what queer theatre festivals and queer theatre are to participants, restate the overarching findings of the study, discuss the significance of the study, suggest areas for future research, and conclude with a final reflection.

What are Queer Theatre Festivals and Queer Theatre and What Makes Them Queer?

Queer theatre festivals are temporal events that encompass multiple performances and other events (e.g., curator talks, play readings, panel discussions, and social events). Based on their experiences at the festival, interview participants were asked to describe what they believed a queer theatre festival and queer theatre were and what made these events queer. Like the term queer itself, there is no clear consensus on what makes a queer theatre festival queer. Rather, queer theatre means many things to different people. However, the power of what queer theatre and festivals are lies in their ambiguity and multitudinous. In the following found quote collage,

I capture the multiple meanings of queer theatre festivals and queer theatre to participants in this study (words in italics are my own).

To Us, Queer Theatre Festivals and Queer Theatre are . . .

pretty broad and . . . **flexible**
[about] **queer stories, queer themes, queer artist**, and . . . also . . . **queering the theatrical presentation form**. (Ben, OUTstages)

not just about being queer . . . but will still have queer content and queer stories. (Ben, OUTstages)

brave. I would define it as . . . **risk taking**. It is . . . theatre that ignores categories and borders . . . [and] is **exploratory**. There's more exploration, I think, both for the artist and for the audience . . . when it's a queer theatre piece. **The audience is often personally invested and there is a lot of energy** in the audience. (Aiyden, Rhubarb)

participatory. *And I don't mean participatory in the rigid sense. Though some queer theatre involves performers interacting with the audience by asking questions or having them take on specific roles, **the audience participates through energy and emotion**. Whether encouraged by the performer(s) or not, the audience will often freely cheer on performers, sing along to songs, laugh out loud, and weep visibly during emotional pieces.*

theatre and performances that **questions societal norms**. (Adian, Rhubarb)

festivals . . . that **allows 'faggatry' to seep into it**. (Jesse, Rhubarb)

oh. . . it is difficult to describe. . . . I think it is an **openness to . . . the experimental nature of theatre**. And that's a lot of people's experience with their own queer identity; they try things until they have more answers and figure things out. (Raúl, Rhubarb)

without boundaries or borders or . . . rigid rules. It's [theatre] without expectations to the social norm and it's inclusive and creates more **space for community and community-building**. (Tanisha, Rhubarb)

political in many ways. It's not milquetoast; it's not a bunch of queer people putting on *Death of a Salesman*. Really good **queer theatre challenges things**. It **throws out new ideas**, is iconoclastic, and **examines accepted beliefs**. It also **starts conversations**. (Peter, Rhubarb)

theatre that has to do with **queer heritage**. [Queer theatre] is something that's pushing forward . . . It's something that **comes from a place of oppression** as well. . . . But being a queer theatre artist does not make all your work queer. (Jose, Rhubarb)

theatre [and festivals] that **pushes boundaries**. All kinds of boundaries like identity . . . story . . . [and] theatrical boundaries. . . . The boundaries are . . . **fluid**. (Daunte, Rhubarb)

theatre that deals with sexuality, sexual identity, and . . . also **looking at perceived norms and why those norms exist and attempting to break that down**. It is [also] a sense of experimental freedom and play, **allowing the raunchy . . . the dirty, and the taboo to be present**. It is from a marginalized point of view. (Thea, Rhubarb)

diverse. It is sometimes difficult and **involves difficult discussions**. I think this is particularly true for queer theatre because of all the **intersections** [in the queer community]. (Jesse Rhubarb)

theatre that **explodes societal views** . . . and societal stereotypes of queer people. (Riley, Rhubarb)

powerful pedagogical and transformative sites.

difficult to define . . . because it's so **wildly different**. If there is one thing that seems to be constant, it's **unleashing one's voice** . . . being able to self-determine, self-identify, [and] self-express our authentic selves. (Keegan, Rhubarb).

events that challenge gender norms and heteronormativity . . . and giving preferences to **voices that are not traditionally heard** (Mitchell, Rhubarb).

Theatre and festivals. . . [in which] . . . **you don't know what to expect**. . . . I think that's what's beautiful about it. (Nina, PWG)

a platform . . . to express identity and express politics in **a safe place**. (Steward, OUTstages)

theatre and performance that . . . puts **voices of the marginalized and oppressed at the forefront, first and foremost**. Where voices that are not part of the normal structures of Canadian theatre or any theatre. The stories that are being told are directly voices that have been neglected for so long. . . . [The festival] is also about **disrupting spaces**. (Tobby, OUTstages)

autobiographical. It is **about celebrating queerness and community** . . . I think it's giving . . . queer artists . . . a space and a chance . . . to be as big and as gay and as loud as [they] want! Like, "Just take up the space!" (Ann Bernice, OUTstages)

not mainstream (postcard survey, Rhubarb)

not the status quo . . . I think [queer theatre] is outside of the norm. (Billy, OUTstages)

fun and entertaining. (Kylie, OUTstages)

in flux. A couple of years ago I would have said it was more about a challenge to homonormativity and assimilating into straight culture. I think this is still true, but it is now . . . also about broader things like neoliberalism and identity politics. It's a forward process. (Amelia, Rhubarb)

Overarching Findings of the Study

The findings presented in this study provide a greater understanding of queer theatre festivals beyond entertainment and aesthetic benefits. This has value because it extends the *value* of these festivals by considering their cultural importance and significance. Art, including theatre, tells stories, and storytelling is an effective way for making meaning and sense of our “complex, complicated, and lived realities and even of ourselves” (Clover, 2019, para. 5). As Dewey (1934) argued, we cannot separate the aesthetic from the experience and benefits that art provides.

The findings suggest queer theatre festivals are performative (in the performance rather than performativity sense) spaces that are inclusive, social, safe(r), and experimental. The overall atmosphere of the festivals is cocreated by festival organizers and festivalgoers (both performers and audience members). Festival organizers curated the festival spaces in this study by (a) using less traditional performance spaces; (b) programming nontraditional and experimental performances; (c) demonstrating a duty of care by programming queer intersectional performers, promoting a culture of consent, and using queer-inclusive language; (d) modeling their own vulnerable and authentic queer selves; (e) queering the space through gender-neutral washrooms and other visuals that promoted sexual pleasure and queer bodies; and (f) offering only general admission tickets that were largely affordable. Performers contributed to the atmosphere through the telling of stories and the embodiment of their vulnerable and authentic queer selves. Nonperforming festivalgoers who were provided with a sense of agency also contributed to the atmosphere by embracing and expressing their vulnerable and authentic queer selves and in some cases by using the festival as an opportunity to queer their bodies (e.g., dressing in drag or other

body modifications). Thus, the festivals for some festivalgoers operated as a performance in a performance.

The festival spaces culminated in a queer liminal home that fostered an intersectional sense of queer community, a community of interest related to social justice, and a community of practice for artists. The intersectional sense of queer community developed is unique compared to the sense of community developed in other queer spaces or events. Participants directly or indirectly referred to the festivals as a metaphoric bridge because the festivals were facilitating connections between various queer communities (e.g., people of colour, trans, Indigenous, two-spirit, bisexuals, lesbians, gays, older and younger generations, immigrants).

The findings from this study also revealed the queer theatre festivals are powerful pedagogical sites. What was learned, how learning emerged, and the impacts and outcomes of this learning was multifaceted. The festivals provided opportunities for festivalgoers to learn about queer culture including queer histories; gender and sexual identity, labels, and fluidity; drag; queer intersectionalities; and current and ongoing queer issues. As a result of this learning, the festivals constituted sites of queer cultural production by cultivating aspirational, linguistic, familial, resistance, transgressive, and intersectional forms of queer cultural capital. However, the festivals are also sites (re)shaping queer culture by addressing and teaching festivalgoers about homonormative hegemony and constructs that influence queer culture (e.g., hypermasculinity, restrictive gender and sexual labels, normative relationships), what constitutes an attractive body (e.g., toned and White), and the view that older adults are asexual. The festivals also provided opportunities for artists to learn theatre and performance literacy.

The way in which learning emerges does not privilege the cognitive over the affective. Learning emerges as a result of festivalgoers' experience at festivals—self-learning following a

festival—and from artists creating and performing. In regard to learning from experience, festivalgoers learned as a result of spoken words and visuals of the performances and their embodied/somatic reactions to performances, self-reflection, collective discourse and reflection, and festival design elements (e.g., gender neutral washrooms, pronoun buttons, and other queer images and objects in festival spaces). Impacts and outcomes of learning consisted of empathy development, therapeutic and healing benefits, a sense of hope, allyship development, and personal transformation. As a result of the latter, the festivals are powerful sites fostering adult transformative learning, including queer identity development and turning queer shame into queer pride.

The findings also reveal that the festivals foster wider societal change and provide social benefits. Namely, the festivals increase the visibility of a queer community, promote queer culture beyond the festivals, result in downstream action by festivalgoers that has the potential to shift wider societal views—including performative notions of gender and sexuality—and provide economic benefits. The overall outcome and benefits of the festivals would not be possible without festival organizers and queer artists who can be framed as queer cultural activist-leaders and activist-leaders, respectively. The findings related to activism and leadership also led me to postulate a new form of leadership—intersectional leadership—and provided insights into the differences between social movement activists and leaders.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study contribute to the literature and provide beneficial information for current and future queer theatre festival organizers. This study may also provide practical information that benefits other researchers. In this section, I explore these contributions.

Contribution to the Literature and Theoretical Significance

Although there exists research on queer film and Pride festivals, to the best of my knowledge there is no detailed study of queer theatre festivals. Further, with the exception of queer film festivals, there is also scant research on queer festivals in Canada and the Canadian queer social movement in general. This research fills these gaps. This study also contributes to literature in the fields of adult education, social movements, queer studies, leadership and activism, and festival studies. By positioning queer theatre festivals in the context of the wider queer social movement, the study has shed light on the transformative power of queer theatre festivals beyond aesthetics and entertainment. This study also provides a new site of analysis (i.e., queer theatre festivals) that has been overlooked in the literature in regard to where adult education is occurring.

By incorporating cultural capital as a theoretical lens in this study, and particularly, various forms of queer capital as suggested by Pennell (2016), this study is the first to my knowledge to use these queer cultural forms as a framework to examine if and how festivals foster the development of these forms of capital. In employing this conceptual framework, this study contributes to the literature by proposing a new form of queer cultural capital—intersectional capital. This study also contributes to the literature by proposing a new form of leadership—intersectional leadership, and by providing insights into transformative learning in festival spaces. Finally, the queer(y)ing methodology based on six heuristics developed for this study contributes to the limited discourse on a queer research methodology.

Practical Significance

The practical significance of this research is fourfold. First, the findings from this study illustrate the power of queer theatre festivals in helping to sustain and advance the queer social

movement. This result suggests queer social movement activists and leaders should continue using festivals as a social movement tactic. The second practical significance of this study is that the findings provide valuable information to festival organizers in terms of the benefits the festivals provide. Festival organizers can thus compare the benefits found in this study with their intentions and use the findings as a framework to measure success. Further, most granting agencies supporting the arts often ask festival organizers to assess the contributions their events have on communities. The findings from this study provide concrete, objective evidence of the contributions. Third, the study provides pertinent information to current festival organizers to ensure the successful development of future existing festivals and to individuals who are interested in creating new queer festivals. For example, the study revealed various facets of the festivals that contribute to creating inclusive, social, safe(r), and experimental festival spaces and an intersectional sense of queer community.

Fourth, my research approach and experience may be useful to other qualitative researchers. For instance, the six heuristics of my methodology and the use of multiple methods and modes of data representation may prove beneficial to researchers conducting research with marginalized populations. In addition, the ethical considerations I raised as a result of my experience may serve as a cautionary tale in regard to the importance of ethics applications and sexual desires in the field. Based on my experience, I also offer the following advice for researchers conducting research of a personal nature: Ensure you set aside time in your research journey for self-care and realize that as a result, completing your research may take longer than is typical. Over the course of my time in the field and in writing this dissertation, I encountered emotional and psychological challenges. Not only was I impacted by the adverse lived realities of research participants, but my own negative past experiences and hang-ups that I had neglected

surfaced. Though the research journey resulted in considerable personally healing and transformation, I was forced to step back and away from my research on several occasions to practice self-care. As a result, completing this dissertation took considerably longer than what I had planned.

Future Areas of Research

Future research directly and indirectly related to this study is plentiful. The following list outlines examples of future research I am interested in conducting.

- I would like to address a limitation of this study by interviewing partner organizations, funders, and sponsors to understand the role, if any, they play in influencing festival structures and programming, and why they decided to support the theatre organizations.
- Re-interview research participants to fully understand how the festivals shaped their behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and identity development now that time has passed.
- Conduct a longitudinal network analysis of queer organizations in Canada to understand the power dynamics between social movement participants and organizations in shaping movement directions and goals, in exerting influence upon one another, and the extent to which they learn from one another.
- Literature on festivals rarely take a longitudinal historical perspective. There is thus value in conducting research on the development of queer theatre festivals over time to understand the extent to which objectives, focuses, and social networks have shifted, and why these shifts have occurred.
- I am interested in further exploring the social experience of gender-neutral washrooms to understand if self-regulation is transpiring in other public spaces. As

evident from this study, binary self-segregation did not exist at the study festivals (i.e., several self-identified women used the prescribed male washroom and vice versa), which stands in contrast to my experience with the gender-neutral washroom on my campus.

- During one of my last few interviews with a younger trans-identified individual who also identified as an activist, the participant kept using the term “guys” when referring to a group of people. I found this ironic and asked them if they were comfortable with the term and what their understanding of the term was. To them, the term was not a gendered term and was a term many of their friends use. Interestingly, in reviewing the data, I noticed several younger participants used this term. Is it possible that the queer younger generation is shifting the meaning of this term, as has occurred with *their*, *they*, and *them* becoming singular pronouns? I am interested in exploring this possibility.
- I am also interested in further building upon and writing additional research on several key findings in this study such as intersectional leadership, intersectional cultural capital, distinctions between social movement leaders and activists, the creation of safe(r) spaces for queers, festivals as communities of interest and practice, and the conditions that foster adult transformative learning in festival spaces.
- Performance as a research methodology has been extensively used by scholars (see Butterwick & Selman, 2003; Etmanski, 2007; Norris, 2016; Wager, Belliveau, Beck, & Lea, 2009). I, however, am interested in taking this methodology a step further by exploring the use of a festival as a research methodology.

A Final Reflection

As I write this final section, the world is in a state of turmoil. We are currently in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic—one of the world’s worst since the HIV/AIDS pandemic that began in 1981 and the 1918 influenza (also known as the Spanish flu). Further, antiracism protests and riots calling for an end to police violence have intensified around the world. Even professional athletes from major sports leagues (e.g., National Basketball Association, Women’s National Basketball Association, National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, Major League Soccer, Women’s Tennis Association) have joined the antiracism protest movement by boycotting games, resulting in the cancellation of many sporting events.

COVID-19 and police brutality and racial bias are of course not queer-specific issues, but queers, especially queers who are of colour, trans, indigenous, or homeless, are particularly vulnerable to its effects because they face health and well-being inequalities rooted in oppression that have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic (Casey, 2019).³⁴ Further, queers (particularly queers belonging to the aforementioned groups) throughout history have been at the forefront of police mistreatment. Sadly, a large number of people are unaware of the health and well-being inequalities some people face and the extent of systemic racism. If only we could encourage all members of society to attend festivals like queer theatre festivals where they could

³⁴ Compared to heterosexuals, and particularly, White heterosexuals, queers face health and well-being inequalities. For example, queers face barriers and discrimination in the healthcare system, have higher rates of underlying health conditions, are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide, have higher rates of substance and alcohol abuse, are more likely to have feelings of loneliness and isolation, face a sexual minority wage gap, and are more likely to be food insecure compared to heterosexuals on average (Casey, 2019; Dietitians of Canada, 2016; Marziali et. al., 2020; OECD, 2019; Waite, Ecker, & Ross, 2019). As a result, pandemics are experienced unequally, with marginalized populations experiencing grater impacts (Bambra, Riordan, Ford, & Matthews, 2020). For instance, queers face an increased risk of serious illness if infected with COVID-19; physical distancing requirements have led to increased mental health issues and feelings of loneliness; stress, anxiety, and fear as a result of the pandemic can lead to increased substance abuse; and queers are at greater risk of experiencing financial challenges (The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020; Wyton, 2020).

learn about such oppressions and increase their understanding of others with different lived experiences.

As we find ourselves in the midst of this pandemic, queer festivals and events have been cancelled in Canada and around the world. In fact, compared to most other sectors, COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on the arts and cultural sector. Given the pandemic will be with us for some time, it is likely that the upcoming 2021 Rhubarb, OUTstages, and Pretty Witty and GAY! (now called Quaint, Quirky and Queer!) festivals will also be cancelled or significantly modified (e.g., moved online). Given the benefits that these queer theatre festivals provide, it is likely that cancellations will have detrimental impacts on the queer community, especially in smaller communities such as Lethbridge and Victoria where fewer opportunities for queers to find community exist. No doubt, we will have queer festivals again, but will they all survive? While there are a lot of unknowns, when festivals are able to be held again we will need them more so than ever!

In these moments of crises, society is at a crossroads. Will we collectively learn from these crises that all members of our society are not treated equally? Will we take this learning and fundamentally reshape structures of society to quash social oppression? I obviously do not know the answers to these questions. But the committed festivalgoers I interviewed who sought a more just world and the queer cultural activist-leaders and activist-leaders who sparked critical conversations about oppression give me hope that fundamental social change is impending. As Margaret Mead claimed, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has” (as cited in Ollis, 2012, p. 2).

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