

Rocking the Boat:

Exhibition Methods of Storytelling the Experience of Gender & Sexuality in Museums

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## Abstract

The goal of this qualitative exploratory research was to identify and describe emerging models for telling/sharing stories of female-identified and LGBTQ experience in museum exhibition. The research investigated interpretation methods of four different participants whose purpose was to tell historically marginalized experience. The projects were the GLBT History Museum, the aSHEville Museum, the exhibit *Revealing Queer* and the associated Digital Storytelling Project. Data was collected through open-ended interviews of professionals directly involved, transcriptions were analyzed for trends and patterns in their methods.

Some key results include;

- 1.) The importance of developing authentic and transparent relationships with the community being represented.
- 2.) A critical finding is that all started their projects because they felt queer voices were not being heard in the museum.
- 3.) Language plays a central part in how exhibitions are received.
- 4.) Be cautious not to marginalize the already marginalized, leave room to add to the archives through listening for silences and gaps in the narrative.

These participants are all examples of “rocking the boat” by taking on topics and stories that have typically not been seen, explored, or accepted inside the museum. The results of this work add to the growing body of research around museums as platforms for social change.

*Keywords:* museum, critical museology, exhibition, storytelling, identity, feminist standpoint theory, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersectionality, narrative, interpretation, language, education, authenticity

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In May 2014, transgender activist and actor, Laverne Cox, graced the cover of *Time Magazine* heralding the “Transgender Tipping Point.” In the past year alone, we have seen athletes and celebrities question the gender binary, including the first U.S. President to ever use the word “transgender.” This is indeed a tipping point in our culture. Historically, museums have failed to tell the stories of marginalized voices, specifically of gender and sexual identity. The absence of these exhibited stories allows stereotypes and misconceptions to remain unchallenged. “Incorporating identity at the most basic level of sexual identity is an important part of realizing that we all see the world through our own lenses – and sometimes those lenses provide differing views of how it is to live in the world. This then begs the question, just where is queer in the museum world?” (Fraser, 2008, p. 7).

I came to this work by way of realizing how influential the museum can be, and how we, this generation of museum professionals, are at the cusp of a new chapter of inclusivity and sensitivity around gender and sexuality. This reality represents an expansion of the work capable in museums. Fraser (2008) describes the importance of sharing stories, not only for those featured, but for museums to serve as a collective representation of the human experience. “The challenge faced by confronting the queer space in museum exhibitions is not necessarily about presenting special exhibits for a subculture, but more about understanding what it means to accept the full gamut of sexual lives as society throws off the shackles of a heteronormative social stereotype” (p. 10).

Museums are considered the keepers of culture and their reflections of human experience tell our stories and help us to better understand one another. Storytelling is a way to pass along insight through point of view, personal narration, and the natural human instinct for connection.

Similar to biographies, personal narrative within museums provide an authentic perspective of those who have lived it. Exhibits present a vital avenue for erased and unheard stories to be shared, counterbalancing historical systematic oppression and colonization. “By offering privilege to the out LGBTQ voice, museums will gain insights into lived experience that may benefit larger groups and more inclusive understandings of the perceptions and misconceptions of the museum in society” (Mertens, 2008, p. 90).

The goal of this qualitative exploratory research was to identify and describe emerging models for telling/sharing stories of female-identified and LGBTQ experience in museum exhibition. The narratives in identity-based museums are voices from a particular point of view rarely present in museums of the past, formed in their own institutions to create space to be heard. During research interviews, the voice of the community was more than once described as the ocean, and the museum as a boat. Changes to museums are not the result of calm waters. But ultimately, identity-based museums can offer safe harbor and all museums can provide opportunities for inclusivity within their exhibition rotation. The results of this work will add to the growing body of research around museums as platforms for social change through authentic representation, educational storytelling, and inclusivity in the formal institution.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Project Goal and Literature**

The research areas of literature include, but are not limited to, American Alliance of Museum's National Standards on diversity and exhibition, community engagement, personal narrative, storytelling, authenticity and interpretation, identity politics, feminist theory, queer theory, and literary theory.

This research hopes to frame and inform experiential storytelling in museums. The research considers experiential storytelling from both an activist standpoint and an advocacy effort to focus on the historically marginalized voice of sexual and gender variant identities.

This research assumes that exhibiting these marginalized stories is a form of activism and the museum should be considered an ally with the communities they represent or serve. The research considers the relationship of knowledge to power and the role of translated experience to an audience as a tool for social change. "When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built" (Scott, 1991, p. 777). Exhibitions are built environments within a visitor's already understood existence.

### **Professional Guidelines & Research Methodology**

The professional guidelines and resources around this research are deep in terms of exhibition protocol, but shallow in terms of defining personal narrative methods. The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) suggests, "Taken as a whole, museum collections and exhibition materials represent the world's natural and cultural commonwealth" (2008, p. 24). As stewards of that wealth, museums are compelled to advance an understanding of all natural forms and the human experience, including those who have been historically devalued and disenfranchised. "It

is pertinent for museums to be resources for humankind and in all their activities foster an informed appreciation of the rich and diverse world we have inherited. It is also incumbent upon them to preserve that inheritance for posterity" (AAM, 2008, p. 24). This statement makes clear that museum collections are the commonwealth of our natural world and the human experience of all.

When disseminating characterizations of excellence in museums relative to interpretation and the product, AAM (2008) says, "The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation" (p. 59). Inclusionary practices are coming to the forefront of institutional interest. From President Barack Obama's statement in the 2011 *Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan*, "Our nation derives strength from the diversity of its population and from its commitment to equal opportunity for all. We are at our best when we draw on the talents of all parts of our society, and our greatest accomplishments are achieved when diverse perspectives are brought to bear to overcome our greatest challenges" (p. 1).

Exhibits that are informed by community outreach and participation have a greater likelihood of telling stories that are authentic and designed in a thoughtful manner. AAM (2004) defines "diversity" as, "The quality of being different or unique at the individual or group level. This includes age; ethnicity; gender; gender identity; language differences; nationality; parental status; physical, mental and developmental abilities; race; religion; sexual orientation; skin color; socioeconomic status; education; work and behavioral styles; the perspectives of each individual shaped by their nation, experiences and culture—and more." AAM goes on to define "inclusion" as, "The act of including; a strategy to leverage diversity. Diversity always exists in social systems. Inclusion, on the other hand, must be created. In order to leverage diversity, an

environment must be created where people feel supported, listened to and able to do their personal best” (p. 1). Researchers Donna Mertins, John Frasier, and Joe Heimlich (2008) suggest, “That rich new understandings can be achieved if researchers were to engage in discussions with LGBTQ community members at the initial formation of research and evaluation studies. Incorporating concepts of power dynamics and how different identities engage and make meaning around a topic may suggest alternative and more meaningful worldviews by which to structure an inquiry” (p. 84). If there is support from the community and a collective voice, the educational value of such exhibits may be increased.

The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) says, “There is no consensus on objective criteria for what constitutes ‘good education’ or ‘good interpretation’” (2008, p. 59). The criteria for what is considered “good” or “worthy” is subjective. However, to ensure a positive community impact, research is a solid practice to build a consensus of the “good” or “worth” of an exhibit. AAM (2008) says, “Some museums were founded to serve the interests of a rather specific, sometimes narrowly defined, community” (p. 60). Identity museums were formed as a reaction to legacy institutions leaving things and people out, though narrowing the lens and pursuing representation from an insular perspective may inhibit the museum’s ability to express the expansiveness of human experience. “From one perspective, this is a museum’s choice—each museum identifies its own mission and audience. Many feel, however, that if this audience is too narrowly defined the museum is, in effect, excluding people potentially interested in their topic, and therefore not serving the interests of the public in a broad sense” (AAM, 2008, p. 60).

### **Research Specific to Museums**

Field-specific research identifies key examples of museums as social change advocates and storytellers. Works like “Museums & Social Issues: A Journal of Reflective Discourse,”

focus on the interaction between compelling social issues and the way that museums respond to, influence, or become engaged with them. Museums are institutions of culture and reflect the changing social climate. A look at the 2008 “Museums & Social Issues” sheds light on efforts to deliberately discuss the relationship between museums and the feminist and gender movements.

Included in the research is the work being done in museums from a global perspective, like “Where’ Is Queer?: A Critical Geography of Queer Exhibitions in Australia” (Gorman-Murray, 2008). This piece illustrates how inclusivity is crucial when rectifying lost histories. Mertins, Fraser and Heimlich (2008) stress the necessity of this work, “because it is impossible to determine how the LGBTQ community may have been excluded from the stories told in the average museum experience today unless we challenge how power, social justice and cultural complexity can be incorporated in future studies” (p. 83). In Mishuana R. Goeman and Jennifer Nez Denetdale’s *Native Feminism* (2009), the reality of a monolithic white feminist movement undermines indigenous women’s stories, but the act of sharing experiences and most importantly listening creates a fundamental reframing of history. This exemplifies how sub groups in already marginalized communities are created and become even more segregated. My research further explores exhibit developer’s intentions to acknowledge those silenced even within the marginalized. Colonization has also affected the museum world, and played a role in the stories that have been represented in institutions. That said, since first publishing in 2006, “Museums & Social Issues” has influenced the field’s outlook to analyze adjusted narratives, similar to the decolonized imaginary that Dian Millian’s *Felt Theory* (2009) writes “to neutralize and sanitize native histories” (p. 13).

The Spring 2008 issue of “Museum & Social Issues: Where is Queer” put feminism and LGBTQ issues front and center. Titles like “Secret Museums: Hidden Histories of Sex and

Sexuality” (Frost, 2008) and “Gay and Lesbian Visitors and Cultural Institutions: Do They Come? Do They Care? A Pilot Study” (Heimlich and Koke, 2008), underscored the importance of representing these topics visually in exhibits. For the museum, these topics are rising in importance as they transition to be viewed as institutions of social change, unafraid to discuss gender as a spectrum and identify marginalized communities as core visitors. “Theorizing the Queer Museum” (Mills, 2008), shows institutional initiative to implement theory to practice in nontraditional forms;

This article engages with this question on a number of levels: it draws attention to the distorting effects that certain models drawn from contemporary identity politics generate in museums, especially in exhibitions with a historical focus, and it examines the role played by concepts of “public opinion” on representations of gender and sexuality in museum spaces. It also considers the challenge that queerness presents to the idea of the museum as a normalizing, meaning-making entity, and asks how these concerns are already being addressed in museum practice (Mills, 2008, p. 41).

Another theme that rose to prominence in 2008 was the acknowledgement of the transgender experience and those that identify outside gender binary confines. At the same time, transgender issues came to mainstream media by way of Stu Rasmussen, the first openly transgender mayor in the United States in Silverton, Oregon. In addition, violence against the transgender community was in the media, with the murder of teenager Angie Zapata in Colorado. Her murderer became the first person in the United States to be convicted of a hate crime against a transgender victim. “Museums & Social Issues” further represented this shift in the museum field with the release of, “M or F?: Gender, Identity, and the Transformative Research Paradigm,” where authors Donna Mertins, John Fraser, and Joe E. Heimlich (2008) write, “We

challenge the representativeness of data that does not recognize the power associated with assuming that someone's genitals might inform how material culture is understood in the museum context" (p. 43).

"Museum and Social Issues" is reconceptualizing histories in a similar fashion as Emma Pérez's book, *Decolonial Imaginary*. Pérez retraces historical steps to recount feminism's place within the Chicana/o movement and the ways in which Chicana/o feminists have been both misrepresented and silenced. The theories Pérez explores revitalize the way history is presented and works to give voice to the silenced communities that inevitably have these stories to tell. Creating decolonial imaginary is not only insightful in terms of telling stories that have been silenced but also a creative act of resistance against constructed history. Pérez (1991) quoted Stuart Hall, who writes, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p 235). This transformation, while appearing subtle, is in fact the most creative and active position of opposition in revisiting history to represent silenced stories.

### **Exhibits**

There are many examples of proven methods that resulted in successful exhibitions. A collection of the field's prior work on the topic identified best practices when going forward and how to expand on past triumphs. One contemporary curation process for translating stories within the museum context is called the Community Advisory Committee model (CAC). The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, Washington is well-known for this incorporative and dynamic curation model. Described by Deputy Executive Director Cassie Chin (2006) as;

Community-based exhibition model that aims to integrate community members throughout the process, from exhibition development to design to fabrication and installation, and including exhibition fundraising, publicity and marketing, education and public programming. We aim to put community members in decision-making positions where they are empowered to determine project direction, set priorities, make selections, and guide project execution (p. 4).

The model is dependent on participation and considers group dynamics and personalities. The outreach process includes not only professionals, scholars, and artists, but also everyday community members with lived experiences. “Understanding who curated the materials and the knowledge system in which these curators are grounded provides valuable information to the viewer” (Robert, 2014, p. 29). Exhibit Developer Mikala Woodward (2013) of the Wing Luke, explained, “Talk is how we connect across racial barriers. It’s how we share our experiences and understand other people’s. It’s how we work together to build an exhibit, a vision for the future and a new world of equality and justice” (p.1).

Similarly, in the book, *Playing with Fire; Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*, there are correlations between the author’s process of collecting voices through journals and interviews and the constructed idea of community collaboration. The author’s uncovering stories of these seven lives in India were made possible in part through the partnership of engagement and sense of camaraderie. “With all this, the group continued to find the tools to give courage to one another- to reflect, remember, write, and share” (Sangtin Writers and Nagar, 2006, p. 10). This example parallels the use and benefit of the CAC and how it works cohesively to thoughtfully represent lives from a collective identity. Incorporating diverse staff,

programming, or exhibitions is not new to the field, but as Gurian (2006) was quoted earlier in this research, “that in fact many voices might need to be heard” (p. 13).

An exhibit at the Wing Luke Museum, *Under My Skin* is an example of an exhibition developed through the CAC model that also relate to this research’s identified experience. A prime example of the intersectionalities present in exhibition, this narrative featured various artists of color and varying gender and sexual identity. One section by Carina del Rosario titled “Passport Series,” included transnational adoptees that identify as transgender and their experienced struggle between race and gender identity as an adoptee forming the construct of home. Woodward (2013) echoed one of the many goals of the exhibition, “Create a ‘safe’ space where people can open their minds and hearts, be vulnerable, sit with discomfort, listen to new perspectives, and speak their own truths.” This is just one of the many nonconforming exhibitions produced by the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience. Scholar and developer of the *Revealing Queer* Digital Storytelling Project, Nicole Robert (2014) spoke of the choice to practice this sort of work in museums as, “with recognition, or consciousness, of existing practices that worked against inclusion. Critical awareness, like this, creates the possibility for systemic changes that prioritize inclusion” (p. 28).

Successful examples of LGBTQ projects include *The Wedding Project* at the Oregon Historical Society. The article, “Queer Collections Appear: Oregon's Wedding Album” (Clark and Wexler, 2008), described the exhibit’s development that represented the historic granting of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2004. “*The Wedding Project* consists of letters, photos, news articles, and other documents related to these couples’ experiences. The fact that the marriages were later nullified further enhances the importance of the collection” (Clark, 2008). In 2012, the Chicago History Museum debuted the exhibition, *Out in Chicago*. The Huffington

Post (2012) described it as, “a groundbreaking, LGBT-centric take on Chicago history that emphasizes the everyday lives of queer communities throughout the city, through the years.”

When translating personal narrative, specifically narratives of marginalized groups or individuals, it is important to maintain awareness of positionality and strive to take a self-reflexive stance. This is easier said than done. In “M or F? Gender, Identity and the Transformative Research Paradigm”, researchers Mertins, Fraser, and Heimlich write, “The transformative paradigm is necessary to this work because it is impossible to determine how the LGBTQ community may have been excluded from the stories told in the average museum experience today unless we challenge how power, social justice and cultural complexity can be incorporated in future studies” (2008, p.83). By learning from the field’s trajectory, this research will better inform future initiatives. And by identifying best methods, it explores the complexities of experience, consciousness, and memory as shared by the museum. “By reviewing existing practices, museum professionals can bring theory into action and explore the praxis of intersectional theory in museum. The application of an intersectional critical analysis relies on recognition of the structures we use in museums that both organize our institutions and regulate social identities, such as race, class, and gender” (Robert, 2014, p. 26).

### **Understanding Experience, Consciousness, and Interpretation**

Historian Joan Scott (1991) says;

Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one’s vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history –are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established,

how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world (p. 777).

This section of the literature review will reference theoretical frameworks that shape this research and inform an understanding of experience, authenticity, and interpretation.

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

The methodological framework of this research includes feminist standpoint theory, relying on supportive material from queer theory and literary theory. Frameworks assist in the researcher's positionality and acknowledgment of their position as academic researcher. Chandra Mohanty (1991) describes this as, "Where the concept of positionality refers to the ways in which a researcher's position in terms of gender, race, class, among other categories, shapes the content of research and critical self-reflexivity becomes a tool to produce a description of that positionality; Representational experiments that seek to interrupt the researcher's own authority by incorporating or juxtaposing multiple 'voices'" (p. 72). Another major method when practicing feminist standpoint theory is intersectionality, the process of acknowledging difference from similar experiences converging to reveal hidden aspects of the self. Sharlene Hesse Biber (2007) defines reflexivity as, "Taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived experience; this self reflection or journey can be extremely helpful in the research process. This will not only characterize the production of knowledge but also acknowledge the social conditions under which experience is produced and grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed" (p. 129). Nicole Robert describes the result of intersectionality as being additive but with its detriments. Robert (2014) says, "This approach fails to consider how these identity-based exclusions overlap, presenting museum

professionals with the daunting task of fitting an ever-expanding rainbow of identities into existing museum archives, programs and exhibits” (p.25).

The curation process must be “open to multiple voices rather than competing orthodoxies are likely beneficiaries as well” (Scott, 1991, p. 786). The process of feminist knowledge is always first deconstructed and then reconstructed. Consciously learning more about “experience” has helped to legitimize critiques of false knowledge production claims and objectivity. In Joan Scott’s (1991) *The Evidence of Experience*, she says;

Part of the project of some feminist history has been to unmask all claims to objectivity as an ideological cover for masculine bias by pointing out the shortcomings, incompleteness, and exclusiveness of mainstream history. This has been achieved by providing documentation about women in the past that calls into question existing interpretations made without consideration of gender. But how do we authorize the new knowledge of the possibility of all historical objectivity has been questioned? (p. 76).

Within the museum, it has often been criticized that some voices typically go unheard or are told as a collective instead of an individual experience. Feminists have had these problems with museums for years, most notably voiced by the Guerrilla Girls (1995) and their poster campaign with the tagline, “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.” Feminist standpoint theory can be part of the groundwork for a richer and deeper understanding of experience, and how to best reproduce what was once lived by another.

## Queer Theory

Utilizing queer theory in this research is useful when defining how we acknowledge difference, identify and dissect the language, historical discourse, and prior experience that created the current socialization of sexual difference.

Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history –are left aside. The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott, 1991, p. 777).

This suggests evidence as to why almost all exhibitions of the queer voice are typically historical, because we must see what has been done to understand how to move forward. In the article "Thinking Sex/Thinking Gender," Annamarie Jagose and Don Kulick (2004) deftly break down queer theorizing as, "Queer theory has become an entrenched, though generally progressive, presence in high education, but it has not realized the (admittedly utopian) potential I (perhaps naively) sensed there for a radical restructuring of our understanding of gender, particularly of minoritized and marginalized manifestations of gender" (p. 213).

In order to get the closest possible representation of experience, anthropologist Naisargi Dave described how when presence is absent, it must be supplemented to inform the whole story. This demonstrates the broader implications of how we understand community and identity formation. Dave (2010) describes this formation as, "Bringing together people who feel (and are educated to feel) under siege, inadequately recognized, and politically impotent. It is precisely through the process by which communities solidify, accrue social value, and inch toward

recognition from their constituent outside that the project of rendering community authentic and representable" (p. 616). This recognition is well deserved and much needed within museums to help the broader population understand marginalized ones.

### **Literary Theory**

Finally, the inclusion of literary theory, where it explores how humans interpret meaning, will further encourage considerations of intellectual interdisciplinary themes. Museology is traditionally interdisciplinary, incorporating many academics, disciplines, cultural, and societal behaviors. The Seattle Art Museum's 2014 exhibit, "*The Mechanical Bride*, an object driven physical representation of the eponymous 1955 book, was an example of a connection between literary theory and exhibition. The book explores the relationship between women and technology during an era where this was considered taboo. All works hung in the gallery were from the SAM collection. Historian Joan Scott (1991) said, "writing is reproduction, transmission – the communication of knowledge gained through a visual and visceral experience" (p. 775). Implementing literary theory in this research is appropriate given the interdisciplinary nature of the museum field. As contemporary literary theorist Ellen Rooney (1989) wrote, "this kind of homogeneity can exist only because of the exclusion of the possibility that "historically irreducible interests divide and define reading communities" (p. 6).

Including foundational lenses from these collected research theories informs the curation process when exhibiting personal narrative. Being mindful of these theories will better inform exhibits and present to the public from a stronger foundation.

### **Experience**

"An intersectional approach to museology is grounded in critical consciousness" (Robert, 2014, p. 31). This approach describes nuanced ways to view methods of exhibition in a reflective

and intentional manner. To do this, there must be a re-imagining of exhibition framework methods. A thorough grasp of research that informs ontology, positions exhibit developers in a more comfortable position as storyteller. Understanding experience is the approach of critical consciousness. In his book *Keywords*, Raymond Williams (1985) describes experience as, “knowledge gathered from past events, whether by conscious observation or by consideration and reflection; and a particular kind of consciousness, which can in some contexts be distinguished from ‘reason’ or ‘knowledge’” (p.89).

“Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain. This kind of approach does not undercut politics by denying the existence of subjects; it instead interrogates the processes of their creation and, in so doing, refigures history and the role of the historian and opens new ways for thinking about change” (Scott, 1991, p. 797). Efforts by museums to expand from traditional methods to translate a more inclusive form of history are new ways of thinking about change.

### **Authenticity**

Museum visitors’ life experiences will always be present when they enter a gallery or exhibition space. “Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political” (Scott, 1991, p. 797). Museums often have the daunting task of representing a community and interpreting stories authentically, whether it a single voice or collective. “In the midst of continued contestation and debate, the notion of authentic community stands as a fundamental expression of common life, common will, and common agency. Such a community is neither a simple collection of individuals or separate acts, nor is it ontologically independent of its co-producers” (Bessant, 2010, p.3). The production of a

collective knowledge as a part of a whole is created through learned and similar experiences, prior ontology. Bassant (2010) theorizes at an essential level we are continually defining ourselves in the course of everyday living (p. 3).

Theorist Martin Heidegger (1996) goes further into the ontology of our lives. “The understanding of a totality of relevance inherent in circumspect taking care is grounded in a previous understanding of relations of in-order-to, what-for, for-that, and for-the-sake-of-which. We set forth the connection of these relations as significance” (p. 333). Ontology is what we know, what comes from our experiences, what creates prior knowledge. Our constructed knowledge has its restrictions depending on the conditions for which experience is produced and grounded in both social location and social biography. “In light of ongoing socio-economic change, there is resurgent interest in examining the evolving interpretations of community in everyday life” (Bessant, 2010, p. 2). An undeniable theme is the necessity to include different perspectives and a clear understanding of the current socio-political climate in order to authentically shape stories. Acknowledging ontology allows the professional to gather a stronger “sense of knowing and be objectively present” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 45).

This presents consequences of a totalitarian system, resulting in the loss of the unique and the reduction of culture to maintain social control. In *The Jargon of Authenticity*, philosopher Theodor Adorno (2002) describes the “reestablishment of the human climate” (p. 91), which is similar to what researcher Kenneth Bessant (2010) acknowledged as socio-economic change and reminiscent of what professor Hanno Hardt (1993) describes in “Authenticity, Communication, and Critical Theory” as the “negotiation of the autonomy of culture.” This unfortunate reduction of culture, or, more likely, our failure to gather varying experiences makes authenticity difficult. In order not to overcompensate for this mistake of museums and histories past, the field and

those who translate stories must steer clear of what could be considered as oversimplified representations. "That which pseudo-individualizing attends to in the culture industry, the jargon attends to among those who have contempt for the culture industry" (Adorno, 2002, p. 19). This is where a museum visitor's understanding of authenticity gets muddled due to the lack of representation and collected knowledge. Museum consultant Elaine Gurian (2006) describes this hurdle to understanding authenticity in exhibition based on, "The interaction between the individual cultural institution and its external political climate is a second element that mitigates against exclusive change" (p.4). This describes how the road to authenticity can get diluted due to external elements impacting experience and perception.

The interweaving facets between community, identity, and authenticity all reflect the universal human desire for connection. Individual subjectivities and community consciousness reflect the inherent tension between individualism and collectivism. "Discourse on the interconnectivity between authentic human existence and community life (i.e., co-historicizing) is implicit in the analysis of personal and social identity. This debate often gravitates toward reflections on how coercive the community is (or can be) in shaping or constituting individual selfhood" (Bessant, 2010, pg. 3). This describes the societal impact a community has on a sense of self or the perspective of an experience. "In a phenomenological sense, a community can be conceived as both a social process and a social product, because it emerges out of ongoing symbolic interaction and acquires a position, 'reciprocal correction,' and 'intersubjective unity'" (Bessant, 2010, p. 163). By a continuous acknowledgement of the surrounding influences, in individual and communal subjectives, the understanding of experience can form through a collective of experiences. "The discourse on authenticity is concerned largely with the nature of individual selfhood and intersubjective relations within a community of others" (Bessant, 2010,

p. 26). Museums have been, and always will be, reflections of the social climate and mirroring the current state of human interest and experience.

### **Language**

One of the most daunting tasks in exhibition work is choosing the language for the narrative. While museums have consistently been held to a high standard of using authentic language, when it comes to silenced populations, it is something of deep importance and little understanding how to best depict a marginalized voice. Social theorist and professor Hanno Hardt (1993) describes how the centrality of communication is the analysis of authenticity and as well as alienation. "At the most basic level, a shared linguistic system is foundational to the phenomenological understanding of how individual subjective and intersubjective consciousnesses contribute to the co-constitution of the common world" (p. 8). This is an important notion to the overall grasp of authenticity. Language is a powerful tool used for inclusivity, but has historically been the perpetrator for exclusive patterns in exhibition.

The oppression of many truths has created a lack of self worth, as well as a lack of representation or material to showcase such an experience. This is why language is an important factor when deciphering what is considered an authentic story. For example, Adorno (2002) describes how the "psychological interpretation of the jargon should discover in this language-gesture an unconscious homosexual transference, and should in that way also be able to explain the patriarch's eager rejection of psychoanalysis" (p. 78). The existing patriarchy and heteronormativity has been part of conscious and unconscious decisions to silence what is different with the result of fueling shame associated with marginalized language and destroying a community's truth and authenticity. "It is important to consider how multiple subjectivities or

egos that can become bound together so as to generate mutual understandings or collective consciousness” (Bessant, 2010, p. 9).

The use of language representing those outside the mainstream has been neglected. This research acknowledges the strong relationship of language, representation, and authenticity, to activism. The importance of language is described as, “linguistically logical limit in the accidental element of even the most precise word. Words’ own meanings weigh heavily on them” (Adorno, 2002, p. 58). Words have power. The essence of a community or its truth can be captured in language’s capacity and jargon’s incapacity to express relationships. False consciousness generated by the "culture industry" and lack of integrated language has resulted in ideological traditions and a much needed critical analysis of mass culture. The acknowledgement of the power play of words can be a true transformation in museum practice. This work, through a better understanding of language, will better decipher the contrast between innate authentic experiences and culturally contrived ones, and add to the overall discussion on the importance of language as an ever changing entity that must be given adequate attention.

### **Truth**

The word “truth” is as hard to define as the concept itself. Similar to authenticity, countless theorists have written about the essence of truth. “Truth in the secondary sense does not mean to be discovering (discovery), but to be discovered (discoveredness)” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 203). Heidegger is describing the essence of being (truth) as always “there” and a continually growing collection. Truth is seen as a constant, ever changing, influential construct from life, like language. Museums are active interpreters, and this is an advantage of the field when pursuing an authentic translation. “Life has its own kind of being, but it is way of a

privative interpretation. It determines what must be the case if there can be anything like just-being-alive. Life is neither pure objective presence” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 46).

Objectivity and its constant presence in one’s reality inform the museum’s capabilities and inability to capture truth in exhibition form. Addressing this impossible feat, Gurian (2006) says, “Let me begin by asserting that I believe there is no absolute truth. There is only opinion, deeply held and often subconsciously influenced by many things, including facts, events, and tangible objects” (p. 11). In a conversation conducted earlier in the preliminary stages of this research as the research goal was taking shape, Museum educator and co-curator of *Revealing Queer* Erin Bailey, was asked if there has been or ever will be an effective form of storytelling in exhibition that leaves prior ontology at the door and provides the most authentic truth. She answered, “No. I don’t. I think that’s the inherent flaw in having exhibition. This is a slice” (personal communication, April 12, 2014).

As mentioned, authenticity and truth are theorized to take shape from surroundings and perception. “All ‘truth’ (even seemingly immutable fact) is synthesized in the eye of the beholder and is therefore subject to changing interpretation” (Gurian, 2006, p. 2). This is where socio-cultural theory could be useful in exhibition practice, acknowledging the ever present importance of societal influence on perception. Developmental psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget describe behavior as, “A mixture of choice from, and effect upon, the environment, exerting optimal control over exchanges. Learning is no exception to this definition.... [Assimilation] expresses the fundamental fact that any piece of knowledge is connected with an action and that to know an object or a happening is to make use of it” (Tatter, 2008, p. 1). Assimilation and our outside influences inform our truths.

## **Storytelling**

Storyteller is one of many roles museums play. The retelling of experiences is a solid strategy to encourage personal meaning and finding place. Exhibition can be like walking into the physical manifestation of a book, or a narrative strung around a room to share and explore. “The question for museum people is how this wonderful adventure or other stories connect the participants to the environment, exhibit or objects in the museum; this is what distinguishes such programs from, for instance, story hours at the local library” (Bedford, 2001, p. 32). At the heart of a museum is the interpreting of stories to create transformative experiences. Museum consultant, Leslie Bedford (2001) says, “Stories are powerful because they do not fill in all the blanks. They open up a space into which the listener’s own thoughts, feelings, and memories can flow and expand. They inspire an internal dialogue and thus ensure a real connection” (p. 29). Radio host, Ira Glass (2009), on “Storytelling” presented by Public Radio International (PRI) said, “One way of telling a story is the anecdote and literally it is just as sequence of actions. What is a story in its purest form; it’s somebody saying that this happened, that led to this next thing that led to this next thing.” Museums are here to capture those sequential moments and encourage reflection.

## **Temporality**

Temporality is a concept that assists when defining an individual or group’s place in time. Temporality formulates what is condoned as important and precious at the time and can inform how some stories were considered important while others were not. It is a spatial concept when looking at disadvantaged groups and the correlation of events over time built within systematic oppression. “The unity of significance, that is, the ontological constitution of the world, must then also be grounded in temporality” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 333). This informs how

positionality can be a calculated step in a series of many steps in socio-cultural power dynamics. “Community is endowed with a temporal quality in that it comprises ‘a people’ who are being transported toward their destiny” (Bessant, 2010, p. 6). “In *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger draws attention to the relationship between an individual’s fate and the community’s destiny” (Bessant, 2010, p. 5). Therefore, the construct of community can be dissected by evaluating how a person or peoples have gotten to a particular place. “From the field perspective, true community cannot be defined by its geo-spatial properties; rather, it is a reflection of mutual interests, shared responsibility, and collective intentionality (Bessant, 2010, p. 25).

This process of looking at time and place affects the museum's relevancy when re-imagining events. In addition, it underscores the importance of the socio-political climate in museum representation. Academic and museum professional, Nicole Robert (2014) has written on the role of temporality in the museum, “Many exhibits rely upon temporal chronology that begins in the past and moves progressively to the present” (p. 26). This “temporal chronology” is embedded in queer experience, explored in José Estaban Muñoz’ book, *Cruising Utopia; The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. “Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (Muñoz’, 2009, p.1). Described through a queer lens, the concept of temporality only adds to this collective of research as a resource for the museum. “Culture (or social reality) reflects but supersedes individual acts through “the shaping of a spatial-temporal sameness” (Bessant, 2010, p. 11).

### **What We Do and Don't Know**

Communication-driven models make co-production between the community and the museum possible. We must not think of a separation of difference but an acknowledgement of active categories and then move forward. “While the mission, content, and methods of museums will continue to be evaluated and revised, there is one aspect of their work that will always be ‘the real thing’ and that is storytelling” (Bedford, 2001, p. 27). The field still struggles to grasp the importance of research and foundational backing. While some of the topics discussed in this review might seem obscure, upon closer examination they make for a more informed development of personal narrative in exhibitions.

Historian Joan Scott (1991) helps to identify maneuvering through difference as, “Inclusiveness is achieved by denying that exclusion is inevitable, that difference is established through exclusion, and that the fundamental differences that accompany inequalities of power and position cannot be overcome by persuasion” (p. 79). Many museums are still figuring out how to maneuver through difference; museums grapple with large issues like colonialism, sexism, heteronormativity, transphobia, and racism to name a few. Legitimized research to make connections support museums in their pursuit of courageous topics, but the most productive way to do this is still under investigation. Bedford (2001) comments on this difficulty as, “Inevitably, I’ve learned that ‘transformative experiences’ are as hard to create as they are to define, but I have become increasingly convinced that storytelling often lies at the heart of them” (p. 28).

### **Advancement of the Research**

This qualitative exploratory research seeks to identify methods when exhibiting personal experience of marginalized stories around sexual and gender identity. This research views exhibition through a specific lens, intended to add to the ongoing discussion. This review of

relative literature illustrates how important it is for museum professionals to research and continuously educate themselves. Through a deeper understanding of theoretical foundations and associated content, the methods will be more reliable, inclusive, and memorable.

This research as a whole is an examination of the relationship between discourse, cognition, reality, and interpretation. This identifies much larger questions of access, authenticity, and how memory production plays a role in conception. The answers to these questions require continuous awareness of process. Having insight into a process through strong methodological frameworks will help engage museums as part of the changing social context going forward. In addition, this will inform the process of how knowledge is formed in museums and how to best infuse methods with intention. Sociologist and cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1999), sums this up well in his book *Visual Culture: The Reader*, "Culture comes into play at precisely the point where biological individuals become subjects, and that what lies between the two is not some automatically constituted 'natural' process of socialization but a much more complex processes of formation" (p. 312).

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The goal of this qualitative exploratory research is to identify and describe emerging models for telling/sharing marginalized stories of female-identified and queer experience in museum exhibition. The research investigated exhibition methods of four different projects focused on historically marginalized stories based around identity. The projects were chosen because they emphasized representation of individuality based around sexual and gender identity. Data was collected through open-ended interviews of professionals directly involved in the project/exhibits. Methodological and theoretical lenses were used to develop a richer understanding through a researched foundation. Trends and patterns were uncovered using word coding from the transcriptions.

#### **Methodological Approach and Framing**

I approach this narrative from the perspective of a feminist, academic, activist, museum professional, and ally. Acknowledging my background, as well as the background of my interviewees, incorporates subjectivity and situates the work within a feminist context. Feminist standpoint theory informed the research as the methodological lens. Through an acknowledged self-reflexive position, this situates the data in an unbiased manner, allowing for the researcher to acquire the data with a blank slate, leaving prior ontology behind and encouraging a dialogue between “participants” instead of “subjects.” “A feminist perspective on the in-depth interview process reveals that it is more of a conversation between co-participants than a simple question and answer session” (Geiger, 2004, p.407). My methodological stance when conducting this research inevitably shaped the production of knowledge and historical memory being recorded but practicing reflexivity when acknowledging difference intentionally informed the most authentic result possible. This approach is particularly relevant for this research because it is

intended to elicit the views and opinions from those who have been excluded and ignored in the museum.

When considering feminist standpoint theory and our lived experiences within a particular set of social relations, oral accounts from the participants guide the process. Researchers Susan Geiger, Hesse-Biber, and Moreton-Robinson (2004) suggests a researcher, “who undertakes oral history work in the context of a feminist methodology needs to image and position as an audience for the ‘results’ several groups of people and perhaps several different ‘products’” (p. 399). When one is giving a testimony of their experience, it must be seen as their representation and as though the researcher is bearing witness. “Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain. This kind of approach does not undercut politics by denying the existence of subjects; it instead interrogates the processes of their creation and, in so doing, refigures history and the role of the historian and opens new ways for thinking about change” (Scott, 1991, pg. 797). Applying methodological and theoretical lenses, particularly feminist standpoint theory, results in a richer understanding of how we connect with one another through our lived experiences.

### **Sample**

The participants were selected based on their missions, to tell historically marginalized stories from the female-identified and/or LGBTQ perspective. These identified participants represent a collective of experiences that have been historically marginalized in the museum and formal institution. The first institution is The aSHEville Museum in North Carolina with a specific focus on their permanent exhibit, *Appalachian Women*, featuring the award-winning video “Forever Free,” created as a collaborative effort with Buncombe County to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Individual stories included *Sarah*

*Gudger*, who describes her experience as a slave, with her family, owners, slave speculators, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, as well as *The Life of Wilma Dykeman*, Asheville native who went on to write many well known novels on feminism, womanhood, and environmentalism (aSHEville Museum, 2015). The second institution is the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco, California, the first of its kind and celebrates 100 years of queer history. Research looked at a range of their identity-based exhibitions: *The Assassination of Supervisor Harvey Milk*; *Constructing Jiro Onuma: Putting Pieces Together*; *José Sarria: Activist and Entertainer*; *Gayborhoods: Lost Queer Landscapes*; and *History is Now: The Dragon Fruit Project*. The third is the exhibition *Revealing Queer*, a temporary exhibit at the Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) in Seattle, Washington, that looked at the fifty year LGBTQ history in the Puget Sound region. The fourth project was featured in this exhibition, the Digital Storytelling Project, which profiled eight identified queer individuals to create digital stories over two workshop weekends.

Interviewees were selected based on the following criteria: their position with the institutions, direct involvement with the exhibition/project as Exhibit Developer and/or Label Writer, and their facilitation of the process from implementation to execution. Each participant was recruited through email with a request to schedule face-to-face meetings.

### **Instrument and Protocol**

Interview questions included a combination of semi-structured and open-ended. For example, each interview began with the same question, “Where did the initial idea for the exhibition come from?” This encouraged a response without borders so the museum professional could answer what first came to mind without influence from the researcher. Probing questions followed into why and how the exhibition evolved into the final product. The question, “Did you

use any sort of theoretical framework when choosing your words, phrasing, and descriptions?” posed an opportunity to acknowledge the methodological lenses the museum/project may or may not be functioning under without assuming that a framework or model was used at all.

The following describes further the interview protocol per participant. The interview for the GLBT History Museum took place on-site in the office of Executive Director, Paul Boneberg. *Revealing Queer* curator, Erin Bailey, was interviewed in Molly’s Café in the Henry Art Gallery. The Digital Storytelling Project curator, Nicole Robert, was interviewed in her home. The aSHEville Museum exhibit developer, Greta Ouziad, answered interview questions via email. Each on-site interview lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour, and was audio-taped with a digital recorder and transcribed in a word document using NVivo. All observations before, during, and after the interviews were recorded by the researcher using a uniform pre and post interview form, as well as a signature of agreement from the participant. These forms are held by the researcher. The recordings and transcripts are saved on a HP Pavilion laptop on Microsoft Word and saved in a password protected folder.

Along with five open-ended questions, subjects were asked to complete two simple tasks, sorting cards in order of most important and selecting a Venn diagram. The cards gave four words; “Authenticity,” “Experience,” “Education,” and “Language” and asked the museum professional to sort them in order of most important to the exhibition/project’s narrative. The second activity asked the museum professional to select one of four Venn diagrams to illustrate the amount of collaboration the exhibit developers had with the community voice being represented in the identified exhibition/project. A final thank-you card acknowledged the time the participant spent during the interview. A letter of consent including the researcher’s contact

information for further questions if necessary was left with the participant, as well as a synopsis of how their answers will be disseminated in the research paper.

Interview Questions:

As the developer of this exhibition and when looking at the initial process, where did the idea for this exhibition come from? And did things change, if so, how?

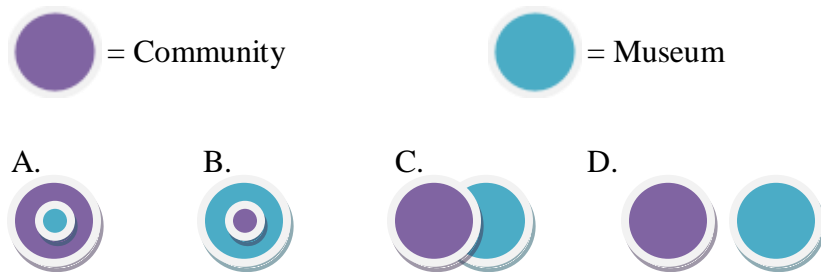
At this time I would like to ask you about the process used to curate and shape the story. Were there any major themes in the exhibition?

Now if we can turn to this quick activity, could you look at these four cards and select the one(s) if any that most represent your philosophy when constructing the exhibition's message?  
[Card text: Experience, Education, Authenticity, Language.]

Is there a word missing here that you would add?

What type of protocol or process was used to collect stories or information? Did you face any challenges?

When conceptualizing the process of the exhibition, would you please choose from the following four Venn diagrams illustrating the collaboration between the museum and community being represented to create the final product?



How much control would you say community had in the presentation of the exhibition?

Now turning to your role as Label Writer for the exhibition and the process when selecting the language, did the language change? How did it change?

If so, are there initial archives of the text from the beginning phases? How was the language used in the exhibition finally chosen?

**Analysis**

All audio interviews were uploaded as Mp3 files along with any supporting documents, uploaded to a research project file using NVivo. Interview transcripts were analyzed and coded to identify trends and patterns in language. Patterns in the two activities were also analyzed to illuminate associations and discrepancies between practices. (See Appendix, Item I for complete interview script). I looked for terms related to practice, how the museum proceeded with their projects, and choices they made due to outside input or internal choices. For example, “Some of our exhibitions are straight from our community, others are more globally focused and created” (G. Ouziad, personal communication, March 3, 2015), was coded as a capacity of community input externally and internally is used in decision processes. Another example of association involves consistent imagery, as more than one participant referenced the museum as a boat and/or the community as water. This was coded for similar words, and the reference created a metaphor that carried throughout the entirety of the work. This reference could also be seen in how the museum practice approached community change.

**Limitations**

This explorative paper and its results do not generalize to all museum exhibition practices as the projects were selected because they are atypical and not representative of general museum institutions or audiences, but can provide a roadmap for institutions that are keen to weave more voices into their exhibit space.

## Chapter 4: Results

This research analyzed data collected from four separate interview transcripts to identify trends and decipher methods. Analyzing the data grounded the work of exhibiting personal experience of marginalized stories in practical foundations. Word coding revealed trends and patterns that pointed to obvious connections for informing future exhibition from researched sources.

### **An Idea**

The initial idea for the research came from the absence in current representation of the LGBTQ experience in museums. The four participants shared the desire to bridge that gap in stories being told and a need to be shared. Nicole Robert described the Digital Storytelling Project as, “Originally Erin and I met just because we both had an interest in museums and in the fact that queer representation and inclusion in museums is not something that’s talked about or done consistently” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). Neither the aSHEville Museum nor the GLBT History Museum explicitly labels their method, but their described similarities involving the community in the curatorial process were evident. Executive Director Paul Boneberg said, “Primarily the community kind of bangs on our door” (personal communication, March 2, 2015). Both curators of *Revealing Queer* had former experience with the Wing Luke Museum and were experienced using models similar to the CAC as their framework. In the early stages, exhibits of this sort begin with an idea or suggestion, and these examples show them typically coming from the community. The proposal then moves forward with the museum professional’s facilitation.

## Process

One of the most challenging aspects of creating an exhibit is beginning the process and securing a protocol. Trends can inform the processes of shaping the stories and major themes. Exhibit developer, Greta Ouziad described ideas at the aSHEville Museum as the spark for exhibitions, similar to how *Revealing Queer* came to fruition between the co-curators' personal academic work and a noticed gap in representation. Their exhibition began with a proposal, which is a typical step when securing the project with a host institution, "We picked the Museum of History and Industry just for their institutional representation and how established they were, are" (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015). Initial phases of establishing protocol with the institution and participants are necessary in order to formulate exhibition themes and determine the formal narrative. Robert said, "We actually had a memorandum of understanding that we developed together and we had a good couple of information nights where we invited people just to come and find out about it" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). In order to recruit for interest or participation when following these models, the museum must welcome external suggestions and make the process accessible, thus inviting a supported group to construct a narrative they feel is important.

## Methods

When creating an exhibition of personal experience, one process is not applicable across the board. Former methods of practice can inform protocol, which is the reason the CAC model was described in such detail. The importance of credibility and authenticity was a similar theme between all institutions. "Making sure that information is credible and matches from one source to another is important, especially for historical exhibits" (G. Ouziad, personal communication, March 3, 2015). The participants all mentioned the importance of research and cross checking

sources that are used as reference. They also stressed the importance of acknowledging the field's past work when telling these stories so to inform their practices. The necessity in understanding history associated with this practice of exhibition is to provide supportive materials for future methods.

The advisory committee for *Revealing Queer* began with the first four meetings of their exhibit development process, helping to inform what needed to be told, what didn't, and how the story would be shaped. Bailey explained, "Coming to the first meeting and say what do you want to talk about. Sometimes it was more professional, in an intentional and thoughtful way. What themes do you want to address in the exhibition? What narratives do you want to include? Who needs to be in the exhibition and what doesn't need to be in the exhibition?" (personal communication, March 5, 2015). And while the aSHEville Museum and the GLBT History Museum do not formally use a community advisory model, their process has similarities. "I would say the community has, they have a tremendous amount of input, but once the decision has been made then control passes to the curators and the exhibit designers" (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 2, 2015). Like *Revealing Queer*, the institution retains overall control in implementation, but this does not appear to hinder the process. The museum professionals facilitate the communities' ideas and translate them into exhibition quality. "But ultimately the control passes and I would say that the community does not have operational control once the exhibits are in process. And then while they are up, they do have tremendous input on the next exhibit and they could volunteer to be the curator" (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 2, 2015). This model gives control to the community by positioning them as decision makers, which allows for a range of perspectives without overlooking the museum professionals' necessity to the project. The two are a creative partnership.

### **Transparent Communication**

In order for these methods to be successful, they must follow criteria. From the word coding, transparency and communication seem to be an indicator of a method's success. Similar to what Woodward described as the threshold for the CAC method, communication is key. Once *Revealing Queer* opened and reflection was able to take place, the co-curators were able to define aspects of the method that could be stronger. Transparency is necessary when describing how much control the advisory committee will have throughout the process and their role once the planning makes the transition to installation. Bailey said the exhibition team knows the spaces better, "I should've articulated how the museum functions in that capacity better" (personal communication, March 5, 2015). Similarly with the digital storytelling aspect of *Revealing Queer*, transparency was necessary when letting the participants know about the future of their projects in the exhibition, and the possibility that not all projects will be included in the final exhibition. "They signed a release form saying they would allow you to use this video during the partnership. But retaining all rights to the video itself was totally not a transparent process even to them" (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

### **Community as Advisory Committee**

Understanding the wisdom of engaging the community is a crucial part in the productivity of this research. The aSHEville Museum explained how firsthand accounts are the easiest to collect and the most successful in their interpretation. A time commitment of 16-24 months of monthly meetings is usually necessary. The number of participants varies depending on interest, knowledge, and accessibility. *Revealing Queer* chose to reach out to 12 different organizations throughout the region. "We invited their staff members, their boards, directors, whoever wanted to come to the meetings to come to help us develop the narratives and to fully

flesh out the themes and scopes of the exhibition. And also help us to identify objects and work with marketing and outreach as well as programming efforts that would happen throughout the run of the exhibition” (E. Bailey, personal communication, March 5, 2015). This decision to reach out to organizations creates partnerships between the museum and a community and sends a powerful message to the community that their voices are valued. It not only reaches an individual, but a formation of like minded individuals involved in an already existing organization.

Even though the Digital Storytelling Project’s participant recruitment required applications, it was still a collaborative process lead by the existing *Revealing Queer* advisory committee. The project received 30 applications and was reviewed at one meeting where the team looked at summaries and talked through each applicant to chose those that most fit the theme of the developing exhibition. The committee tried to look for applicants marginalized even within marginalized communities. This included, “underrepresented even within existing lesbian/gay archival materials so there was a considered effort to try to invite applications from people who identify outside of this kind of gay, cis-gender, lesbian, white, middle-class framework” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015). The team invited 12 and eight accepted. Robert believes that the project location of Bothell could have limited participation due to travel and a participant requirement of two working weekends.

The community as an advisor is a method created because the historical lack of trust between communities and institutions. Bailey described this as, “To trust in the institution to tell their histories to ensure that their history is not censored, rewritten or misinterpreted. So using the CAC allowed us to overcome that” (personal communication, March 3, 2015). This model encourages relationships with those beyond the museum’s regular radar. It is a partnership

building model that enables connection and a more widely accepted human experience by finding similarities in conversation. In the Digital Storytelling workshop, “We asked them to build physical connections with each other around where they saw their stories overlapping, so they ended up just building this huge kind of connected framework with their own bodies and in that moment when they were all just looking at each other and seeing those connections, that was a really crucial development moment that they brought into the emotion of what they actually expressed” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

These partnerships help the museum tell more authentic stories. And while the aSHEville Museum does not label their methods, their practices place them in similar a category. “Some exhibitions find their way to us or are proposals from other organizations looking for ways to partner” (G. Ouziad, personal communication, March 3, 2015). As described by the *Revealing Queer* curators and GLBT History Museum, the museum’s role as facilitator is necessary, “to move that forward and make recommendations” (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 3, 2015). This method describes the necessity to create partnerships, as the museum acts as facilitator practicing transparency. However, the method must also assert the finalizing of the installation is still in the hands of the museum, but the content created by the actual experts are those who have lived the experience. It is a creative and therapeutic process, as it opens up opportunities to be heard and share some of the decision making power.

### **Themes**

The four examples show evidence that processes and protocol sprout from an idea. This idea will then be discussed by the museum team and the community (or CAC) to form a fully fledged theme for the exhibition. Robert describes these stages as, “develop a partnership with a significant history museum and work with them to create both the conversations and the

representation, some kind of representation of queer lives, queer histories” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). Again, the word partnership is used when describing their method. When specifically identifying the themes of *Revealing Queer*, Bailey described, “The CAC chose to tell the story of regional policy, language, community organizations, individuals, as well as celebrations. Which included anything from Pride to film festivals to any of those sorts of celebratory activities that happened in the region” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). The theme of regional topics is a narrative that weaves throughout the four participants, as they were mostly all historical retellings except for some contemporary topics and art installations. “We wanted to address the last 40 years of LGBTQ history in the Puget Sound region of Seattle, Washington and Washington State. We decided that because the fact that it was only three years since what happened at Stonewall in New York City in the 70s, so bi-coastal activism was pretty impressive. So we needed to tell the story about how progressive Seattle was in regards to politics, activism, as well as its communities” (E. Bailey, personal communication, March 5, 2015). The direction of the narrative will begin to emerge through the community and advisory committee meetings.

### **Defining the Narrative**

“With each exhibit, it is important to define the theme plus what is the intent behind creating the exhibit. Is there a particular message you are hoping to relay or something you are looking to build awareness of?” (G. Ouziad, personal communication, March 3, 2015). The aSHEville Museum describes how methods inform the exhibition narrative and strong research as foundations inform the methods. Robert describes the Digital Storytelling Project narrative as, “To have a chance to develop the actual training and think about how we apply these feminist revolutionary principles to the making of media” (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

One tool for defining the narrative that was identified in the study included brainstorming, like using index cards to identify trends. This builds connections around particular themes and between those involved, like in the digital storytelling aspect of *Revealing Queer*. “Of this group of eight there has been this many people that no longer have contact with family origin or this many people who had transitioning gender identity” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015). These methods allow for ways to relate between experiences and the committee to better understand one another and create engagement. Bailey further illuminated the narrative of *Revealing Queer* as, “We wanted people to fall back in love with Seattle because of the LGBTQ community and we also wanted to show how progressive and forward thinking Seattle was because of the LGBTQ communities” (personal communication, March 5, 2015).

### **Obstacles with the Community as Advisors Method**

As with any method, nothing is foolproof. Acknowledging the obstacles that these exhibitions faced, even using a progressive method like the community advisory models, better informs the practice going forward. For example, one obstacle was the lack of voices available to share their experience. Many who lived the history have died from AIDS, suicide, or violence. Another obstacle is that not everyone speaks “museum” and terminology can become tense and overbearing to a community member in an advisory committee with no prior experience with the institution. A final obstacle is the overall lack of physical material available, which will be further discussed when identifying object trends from the participants.

### **Trust**

The difficulty in recruiting community members is often due in part to the historic erasure of these histories. Community hesitancy to become involved can be explained from former feelings of inadequacy. A large obstacle to overcome with the community is gaining

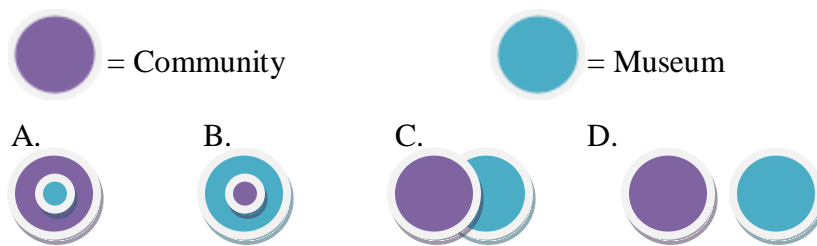
credibility and the trust of the community. The promise of an affiliation with a well-known institution can be advantageous but it can also be challenging due to the lack of institutional trust. Robert described this in their experience as, “It brought all the baggage that MOHAI has with it, so MOHAI has a poor history of working with communities of color or queer communities, they have not been really one to do a lot of outreach and so I think both the fact that we were unknown and MOHAI had that reputation maybe were some obstacles for us to overcome” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). Though the community advisory model can mend that historical lack of trust between queer communities and institutions, creating relationships is still difficult. “That was the hardest challenge to overcome to not only convince them that not only I but MOHAI thought their story was important, and that they needed to tell it” (E. Bailey, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

### **Community**

The research shows how the community holds the key to museums’ reputation as authentic when telling marginalized stories, similar to the necessity of water to lift a boat. Making intentional contact and an inviting opportunity, where the individual will feel uplifted by the experience, is how a strong partnership should be created. These four examples can all be considered community based institutions/projects. They have described how the light bulb of an idea is typically from those with the experience, and therefore their input is an important one and could form the framework of the story going forward. Inviting and acknowledging community input makes this collaboration possible. The GLBT History Museum explained how important it is for them to tell an authentic story with presentable materials, “Our audience has a certain percentage, maybe 10% of the people are the people that lived the history and for them, what they want, they are going in to see their history” (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March

2, 2015). With an audience of 15,000 visitors annually and 100-150 volunteers, this museum's impact is measured by those who have lived the stories. "Primarily it's this ocean of community that is endlessly feeding back to us that we respond to, we want them to be happy" (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 2, 2015). As a community based institution, their livelihood relies on visitors in the neighborhoods around them. The GLBT History Museum relies on 100-150 volunteers over the course of the year, making their role in the community's good graces paramount. "The community is right there every day constantly keeping it going or keeping it not going. So we literally float on this community of goodwill that is making it happen" (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 2, 2015).

The participants were asked to choose between the following four Venn diagrams, each illustrating the collaboration between the museum and community being represented to create the final product.



The Digital Storytelling Project was a little different in that the participants were creating work for themselves. They signed an agreement that the videos could be used in the exhibition, but in the end this was their work and they had the power over how it would be done and what would become of it. Therefore, Robert determined that the workshop stage of the project would be D. The museum had little to no say in how, why, or what was produced during the workshop. Then C was chosen in terms of the project's involvement with the exhibition, an interrelated relationship where the videos were to add to the finished exhibit. The aSHEville Museum chose

B, illustrating the institution's authority. *Revealing Queer* and the GLBT History Museum chose A, illustrating the museum working as part of the community instead of the community in regards to the museum. This is interpreted as willingness to give up institutional control to the involved public. Boneberg described their process in terms of this activity as, "We don't get any big giant Foundation or NEH or any of that for the museum. It's sustaining itself based on community support. In fact, I would make the turquoise [circle] smaller" (personal communication, March 2, 2015).

### **A Boat on Water**

An analogy that emerged through the research interviews was the idea of the museum as a boat, which sits on top of the water which is the community. Paul Boneberg mentioned this many times in context to the GLBT History Museum as, "We exist on this kind of ocean of the community input" (personal communication, March 2, 2015). The boat follows the tides, as the tides move, the museum moves with it. Waves also have the capability to shift the boat. Created by wind, the wave metaphor could be considered an outside influence. Socio-cultural motivations affect the community, thereby "moving the waters to create waves" that shift the boat. The boat, or in this case the museum, must navigate the change in the waters to stay afloat and sail successfully.

### **Identity**

Typically the museum has chosen to tell the stories of female-identified and LGBTQ experience as historical. For these exhibits to resonate in the present there must be a visible sense of self, or in other words, an understanding of the essence of one's identity. This will not only feed the narrative but also come through as authentic and truthful to the onlooker. The *Revealing Queer* advisory committee wanted to recruit individuals who were familiar with their own sense

of self, whatever that may be. For recruiting the digital storytellers, an application revealed the diversity of experience. For instance, when presented with a blank space asking how they identify, participants had no consistency. “I think this is really interesting and the questions were just designed to illicit, can you construct some kind of a narrative, but not” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015). This format of questioning reverts back to feminist standpoint theory, where Robert acknowledges the project’s intention to make something from the questions, but exactly what depends on the answers that unfold. Allowing for individuality in an unassuming environment is the source of feminist work and practiced in this example. “And even though it was a queer museum project we just basically said, you're queer enough to be here, you're here that's queer” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Another method when constructing identity in exhibition form is what information is volunteered before asked. Those in the community suggest what the museum should show by a “knock on their door” as Boneberg said. Long time members of the San Francisco’s Gay Men’s Chorus suggested their anniversary was coming up and they wanted to have an exhibit at the GLBT History Museum. These volunteers took on the role of curator and brought the choral collection to the museum to develop *The Gay Men's Chorus: 35 Years of Activism through Song*. Institutionalizing this type of volunteering is a change that the museum must implement in order to solicit these kinds of exhibits. Making the museum more approachable would help to make “knocking on the door” feel possible. One suggestion is onsite or digital comment/suggestion opportunities to hear the visitor or community input. The rich possibilities and successes when the community has access to suggest exhibition narratives help to construct identity in exhibition choices.

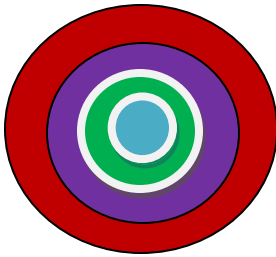
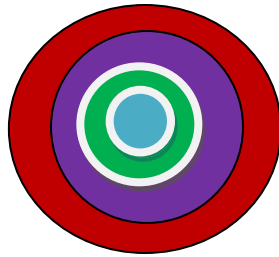
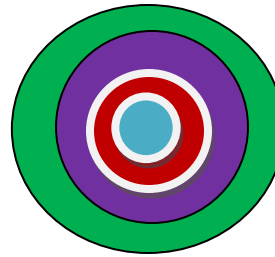
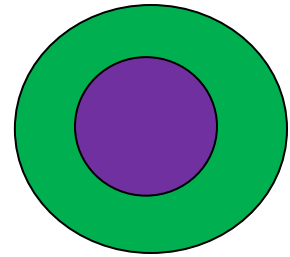
## Language

From the identified projects, language plays a central part in how exhibitions are received. When looking at marginalized communities, detail to terminology is necessary for identity, authenticity, and the respectful nature of the story. The female-identified, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and queer experiences are associated with language that has at times been marked as derogatory. “The use of language changes depending on many factors: Is the exhibit historic or contemporary? Is it in third-person or first? Is there a particular emotion behind the exhibit that you want to portray?” (G. Ouziad, personal communication, March 3, 2015). These are all important questions that should be asked by the exhibit development team in the initial stages to inform the choices of language.

*Revealing Queer* is a good example of the intentional use of language, with a particular interest to discuss the importance of words as part of the narrative. The advisory committee chose to create a word table with sections: gender, sex, sexuality, and the definition of LGBTQ. Individual labels used to describe majoritive words, “queer” was in both the LGBTQ and majoritive language list so to have both ends of the spectrum represented. Bailey describes this sensitive and ever-changing topic as it pertains to the exhibition as, “We put ‘dyke’ in as a majoritive and that ruffled a couple feathers because ‘dyke’ was reclaimed kind of like ‘bitch’ or ‘cunt.’ But in the context of the audience we were serving at MOHAI that conversation was too deep to have” (personal communication, March 2, 2015). Bailey describes these efforts of intention with the hope that visitors would continue to research the meanings behind words, “From that they will understand that it was political then became majoritive and now is used almost like a gender expression in many situations and they can suck all that information up themselves” (personal communication, March 2, 2015).

The four participants were asked to look at four index cards and select the one(s) if any that most represented the philosophy when constructing exhibition messages. The cards read: “Experience,” “Education,” “Language,” and “Authenticity.” The following is a bulls-eye representation of how each theme was categorized. The center is considered the most influential, moving outward to the largest circle being the least involved in terms of the theme.

Key
Experience = Green
Education = Purple
Language = Red
Authenticity = Blue

GLBT History MuseumDigital StorytellingRevealing QueeraSHEville Museum

This activity illustrates the similarities and differences in terms of the main goals of what each project/exhibition hoped to portray. It is interesting that the GLBT History Museum and the Digital Storytelling Project chose exactly the same in order of most to least importance. Both of these participants spoke about the necessity for community, trust, and acceptance in order for their continued success. “Authenticity” as the most important and “Experience” as second to the narrative illustrates goals to provide availability for self-representation and exploration. This can also be seen in both of their described methods for collecting story ideas. Three out of the four participants chose “Authenticity” as the center. *Revealing Queer* and the aSHEville Museum both chose “Experience” in some capacity. But “Language” was more important to *Revealing Queer* than the others, which can be attributed to their language section and attempt to modernize

Seattle’s LGBTQ representation. The aSHEville Museum chose to identify only “Education” and “Experience” as main philosophies in their work.

The participants were then asked if there were any additional words they would like to add. Every participant chose to include an additional word, a testament to the individuality of each and every project/exhibition:

- GLBT History Museum: Passion or Flair
- aSHEville Museum: Awareness
- Digital Storytelling Project: Community
- *Revealing Queer*: Authority

### The Language of Labels

Developing exhibition labels takes a lot of time and dedication. In the memorandum *Revealing Queer* signed in partnership with MOHAI, Bailey added the following addendum, “Yes, MOHAI can have the curatorial authority however they cannot change any language without running it past me first.” (E. Bailey, personal communication, March 2, 2015). All four processes had cooperative involvement in the label writing and everything was submitted to the directorial team for final curatorial approval. This illustrates the museum’s positionality as hands-off in the creation but facilitator to what is considered “museum quality.” This is not a detriment to the methods, just a forethought that should be acknowledged throughout the process.

Setting intention with the label’s choice of language is important. The participants all concluded that without their communities’ influence, the language would be a near impossible feat to translate as authentic. Robert suggested that there be a label included in exhibition naming the committee format. “I think I would've liked to include more just explaining like this is how



these choices were made because maybe people would have a better understanding of why some things made it and some things didn't" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). Robert did include that there was a label explaining the workshop. Though the Digital Storytelling Project did not necessarily focus on language, many of the makers articulated a goal of what would they have wanted to tell their younger selves. "Some of them chose to play with language in their videos but that I don't think was a driving force" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). The participants all stressed the importance of text review and reported hiring copy editors, an important element to include in the budget for an exhibition.

### **Objects**

What is an exhibition without objects? The research exposes a lack of physical material for exhibitions of personal marginalized experiences. Queer history has not been well documented in museums, and what has been considered "other" has unfortunately not held value in the societal eye of the past. Bailey discussed how it was difficult to find originals, as there were mostly reproductions of flyers or meeting minutes, not the actual piece that would make an exhibition authentic. She commented that this was due to the historical lack of trust between the community and the museum. "In regards to collecting, what gets kept and what doesn't get kept is a lot of queers in the community have the objects and multiples of them and they don't trust anyone in the institution so they put their objects, their ephemeral objects, in multiple archives for fear that one day they will be deaccessioned" (personal communication, March 5, 2015). In addition to lack of trust issues, many of the materials may not be available. Robert said, "Grappling with the idea that a lot of people who identify as not straight maybe don't have access to some of their own memorabilia because of broken relationships with family origin or some of the challenges with maintaining employment or home and so just individuals collecting stuff

may have not been as consistent. In particular among the more marginalized communities within LGBTQ collection of identities” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). The GLBT History Museum also acknowledged this lack of materials as due to the possibility that objects were not kept because they were thought to have no research value. Boneberg went on to describe how their practices are beginning to change toward collecting specifically for display because objects that someone may deem unimportant may be the physical manifestation of the story for another. He spoke about how they are beginning to acquire materials for the archive by asking, “What items are we missing from our collection to tell the stories we want to tell?” (personal communication, March 2, 2015). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and their exhibit, *Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals 1933-1945*, not only experienced similar limitations with actual square footage for the exhibit, like *Revealing Queer* and The GLBT’s physical space, but also the inability to find objects related to victims. “In this particular case, however, few artifacts exist to illustrate this side of the story, for many reasons, not least of which were the shame and the stigma that remained attached to homosexuality in Germany well beyond the war years” (Phillips, 2008, p. 108).

Missing objects, a critical feature for exhibition of personal stories of gender and sexual identity, must be collected in other nontraditional forms. Described by all four participants, doing this sort of work is a new role within the museum field, and a response to the ever-growing stories of these communities. Robert described this as the Digital Storytelling Project’s intention, “Not



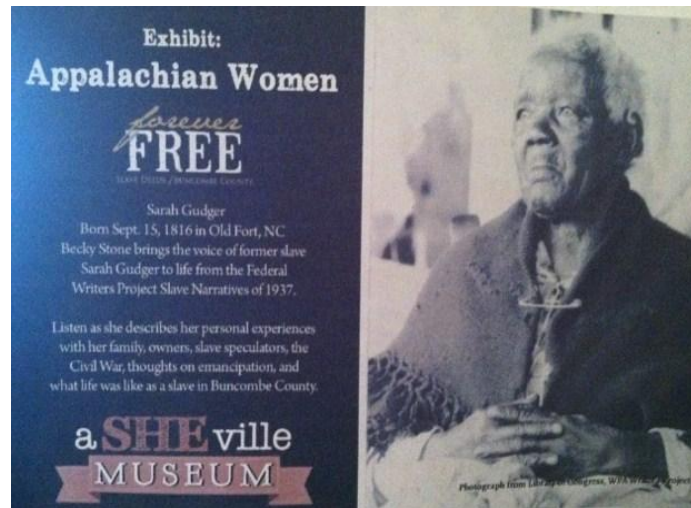
just to create this intervention but to have some sort of endearing impact on what gets collected [as well as] addressing some of the issues around what counts as LGBT objects” (personal communication, March 12, 2015). These digital works created an artifact that did not exist before and they tell a story that may have not been possible. The GLBT History Museum’s exhibition, *José Sarria: Activist and Entertainer*, documents Sarria’s life through costumes and ephemera, from his days performing at the Black Cat Café to his historic run as the first openly gay candidate for public office in the U.S. (For further images from this exhibit refer to the Appendix, image A.2).

Other suggestions when adding to the archive include exhibition interactives. Leaving room for community input through the duration of the exhibition will encourage point of view and express the museum’s willingness to hear feedback. Bailey did this in *Revealing Queer* described as, “we left it open for people who were coming to add on historical facts, to add on information to the labels or text that we may or may not didn’t have” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). This can be done through post-it notes, dry erase markers, or comment cards. It allows the community to continue to invest in the exhibit, even after the exhibit is mounted. The aSHEville Museum described relationships with other museums, universities, and historical collections as one of their methods for gathering objects and information. As a regional institution, aSHEville has received much of their archives for their exhibit, *Appalachian Women*, from the Western Regional Historical Archives. This included pictures, objects, and daily household items to represent the daily lives of the pioneer women in North Carolina (Refer to Appendix for photos B.1-B.5 from this exhibition). Due to their close proximity with the region and their historical material, the possibility of a wider range of objects is available. Therefore, having standing relationships with other organizations in and around the institutions area will

support the museum's delivery of authentic regional stories.

### Oral Histories

Another addition to the archive is the collection of oral histories. This method was mentioned by every participant and spoke about with great passion as a reliable and innovative source when adding to the archives. Oral histories make it possible to create linear and non linear narratives, both practiced in the Digital Storytelling workshop. This encourages the present material



to catch up with the past, allowing for a more current representation than the typical historical exhibition. Robert said, "I am a big believer in oral histories... I wanted to see what it would mean for people to design their own representation knowing that they were creating this final product that could potentially be in an exhibit or seen online, that they could decide, this is what I want people to know about me and this is how I want to be seen" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). The aSHEville Museum's *Appalachian Women* exhibit also includes the video, "Forever Free," an oral history from Sarah Grudger, describing her experience as a slave in Western North Carolina with her family, owners, slave speculators, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. It is an amazing testament to the power of voice and provides the visitor an immersive experience. Listening to her story, in her own words, surrounded by the items she used, really exemplifies the life this woman lived through ephemeral and physical objects.

The GLBT History Museum has also engaged oral histories as a reliable method in many

of their exhibitions. Their main gallery, named *Queer Past becomes Present*, is made up of many stories telling the vast history of their community. One example includes the enigmatic *History is Now: The Dragon Fruit Project*, which showcases an intergenerational historical preservation



project within the queer Asian Pacific Islander (API) community in 2013. One of the labels describing the Project read, “Out of the 710 collections in the archive, no more than a handful documents queer Asian Pacific Islanders. As perhaps the

first generation of openly out API queer and transgender activists approach their seventies, their history from the 1970s and 1980s may literally be lost” (GLBT History Museum). This created an intergenerational conversation on activism, coming out, love, life, and brought youth closer to their elders. Boneberg said, “Hopefully the API community knows that there is a series of exhibits about the API community’s oral history and they come in, but hopefully they see that, they see the youth/elder conversations and understand this is part of an oral history and it rings true to them” (personal communication, March 2, 2015). In the large gallery of the GLBT History Museum is a display that creates a very intimate view with *The Assassination of Supervisor Harvey Milk*, one of the most tragic and galvanizing events in queer history. A button lights a screen and behind it is the suit that Milk was wearing when he was shot and an audio recording excerpt from Milk’s political will begins, telling people to keep hope. The audio ends with a portrait of Milk, a very powerful use of oral history.

No method is perfect as each has their challenges, and oral histories are no different. Oral histories must be done in uniform and presentable environments so they stand the test of time.

This was the problem maintaining them, as much of the technology was not up to par and standards were not consistent. Unfortunately, reverting recordings to discs is cost prohibitive and inaccessible for many exhibition budgets. Bailey described other difficulties as, “You have to get these people in a studio like space or bring the studio to them so either way it’s very difficult and expensive to actually get an oral history that is of quality to put into the museum and that is why there is so few of them in exhibitions” (personal communication, March 5, 2015).

### **Space**

The space these stories occupy is often the essence of the communities’ livelihood. All four participants are considered community-based, specifically the GLBT History Museum, which is located in the historic Castro District. With its streets lined with rainbows, this history museum is a physical and spatial representation of those that walked them. Creating space is very important to the queer identity, as they have for so long been denied their own position to exist. This explains the paramount importance of neighborhoods and bars in San Francisco. One of the labels in the GLBT History Museum’s exhibit on San Francisco in 1974 read, “As an activist of the time, Larry Littlejohn said, ‘The bars were to the gay civil rights movement what the churches were to the black civil rights movement.’” This illustrates how the space of bars created a sort of haven for those in the community and therefore making the objects there an iconic representation of what these places meant, affectionately naming these spaces, “Gayborhoods.” (For more pictures from this exhibit, refer to Appendix image A.7 – A.9.)

Similar to lived experience, the physical space allotted to exhibitions telling these stories has always been minimal. Bailey discussed this frustration as, “We only had 1000 square feet to work with so one of the issues that came up is that we couldn’t tell the depth of the story we wanted to and we couldn’t address all the topics we wanted to address. For example AIDS was left out, it wasn’t left out, but it wasn’t addressed in a deeper intentional kind of way and that

was a choice that was very difficult for the CAC to make” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). The LGBTQ community has historically struggled for lack of space, lack of appreciation, and erasure of voice, which results in their stories being ignored. Robert discussed how the Digital Storytelling workshop along with the *Revealing Queer* advisory committee wanted the narrative to talk about how people survive by forming community. Some examples in their work included sports teams as well as the importance of bars as places of refuge.

### Third Spaces as Places

The idea of third space is new to the museum world but it has been a part of the feminist and queer experience since the 1990s. Due to the lack of representation, those who are



marginalized have to create their own havens where existence is without contestation. The Digital Storytelling workshop acknowledged that this project was a part of creating that space and embodying what queers have had to create in order to survive. “That process for me as the facilitator was about holding space, encouraging them to explore those but also moving them. Giving them that space but also pushing them toward decision making and continuing towards a product” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015). The 2012 issue of “Museums & Social Issues” sheds light on this influence with the article, “Museums as Third Places or What? Accessing the Social without Reservations.” Natalye Tate (2012) says, “The applicability of the ‘Third Place’ concept to museums is considered relative to moving visitors from the position of users to that of stakeholders in a cultural institution. In this move, experiences are an integral part of the creation of Third Places” (p. 269). Third space feminism identifies the constant transition of diaspora identities to find an existence of place. Temporal

placement of the identified experiences has always been in the past, possibly because inclusivity constitutes loss of power for some.

### **Obstacles**

Each participant in the research mentioned their own challenges, and lack of objects was a pattern throughout. The issue of having a story to tell without objects to show is the result of a history of exclusion and denied access. It is a response to the formative institution's collection practices when classifying what is important and what belongs. Besides the lack of objects, technical problems also arose for the projects. Specifically, the Digital Storytelling workshop stressed their issues with obtaining professional-grade audio recordings, which rang true to Bailey's comments of the poor quality in older oral histories. Discrepancies in communication were an issue when working as part of a curation team. Robert described this diffuse group work as, "After the workshop we had these videos and people responded really well to the videos in general but when it came to the exhibit I often felt like the videos were just forgotten" (personal communication, March 12, 2015). The videos were not as integrated into the actual exhibition as she had originally thought they would be, though this is not a response to the methods neglect, but rather, a lack of communication between the institutional installment requirements and participants. That said, Robert did report that MOHAI held screenings of all eight films on three different occasions, and several filmmakers have since gone on to share them in local film festivals.

### **Marginalizing the Marginalized**

A pattern that all four participants revealed was the act of marginalizing even within groups who have been denied exposure in society and the museum. *Revealing Queer* co-curators described their issues of developing a community advisory committee outside of the white, able-

bodied, gender conforming population. Bailey tried to formalize reasons as to why, “Part of me thinks its cultural difference, potentially regional difference, and part of it is that they just don’t identify themselves because they are already so oppressed” (personal communication, March 5, 2015). Trust comes up again, or the lack thereof, “We wanted there to be more gender nonconforming or trans, or communities of color, or low income. Just people even within LGBT archives who are underrepresented. So yeah, that was a challenge I think for us that we didn’t necessarily have that trust” (N. Robert, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

The GLBT History Museum experiences similar issues with lack of perspective due to the absence of entire groups and lack of perspective. Boneberg spoke to this, “The trans community an underrepresented community by and large. Often in the early days profoundly oppressed community in many ways so much of the history doesn’t survive. Major events where there is no person, no stories, no photographs, there’s no material” (personal communication, March 2, 2015). Bailey also commented that when MOHAI returned their label drafts with edits, nearly all of the transgender history had been edited out. This was an oversight due to a lack of understanding of how necessary it is to be critically aware of what information is being promoted. Temporality describes “falling prey,” seen as the ontological concept of constant motion for self-preservation, translating how some groups unfortunately become more oppressed due to the constant race that develops from the socio-cultural hierarchy (Adorno, 2002, p. 168). Marginalizing the already marginalized reinforces power even more so. Boneberg addresses this discrepancy as, “The main objection we get from the community, if there is any, is that everything is not enough, they want more exhibits, and they want every exhibit to have more stuff.” He says, “Our sins are generally sins of omission, no one is saying we told the stories wrong, they are just saying tell more of the story, tell more stories” (personal communication,

March 2, 2015).

### **Outcomes**

The results from analyzing these four participant transcripts deliver concrete examples as how this work is being done. Examining these institutions/projects and their process informs the tools necessary for greater museum inclusivity. These tools catalyze further knowledge. They spark conversations with cousins, nieces, nephews, that can start to bridge understanding of the range of queer experiences. The essence of the research is careful listening and acting with intention. The participants have all described the importance of truly listening, in other words listening through silences to hear full stories that can be shared and inspire growth in others. Museums can provide that space to listen for communities and then interpret for others to learn, relate, and hopefully grow. Through doing this work, the museum boat continues to float on the voice of the community ocean, shifting with their changing waves. This work frames the importance of the community to the institution. The community ocean keeps the boat afloat but also has the ability to agitate the water for a new direction. The museum will benefit from the community, acknowledging their impact and necessity with respect and constant awareness of what lies beneath the water. “My hope is that five years from now I will look back at the labels that we wrote and think this is where we were five years ago with the time and thinking and this is where we are to today” (E. Bailey, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

### **Suggestions Going Forward**

The result of this work is meant to create additions to the tool box for museum professionals going forward. Reflecting on the supporting literature, methods, and analyzing the findings, produced tangible evidence that benefit practice.

- *Research as Foundation/Acknowledgment of Mistakes*

The lack of inclusive representation in museums is in part due to the absence of foundational theories. This is alluded to in critical theory as the idea "to reconstruct the generation of historical forms of consciousness in order to demonstrate how they misrepresent actual social relations and thereby justify historical forms of domination" (Adorno, 2002, p. ix). It is foundational in order to adopt an authentic storytelling method. There first step is an acknowledgement of former omissions in terms of the how information has been gathered and which stories were chosen as authoritative. As a field, a collective negotiation of theoretical foundations and re-imagining of methods will aid in an informed understanding of what is authentic.

The research outcome has distilled this theoretical process in hopes of acting as an interdisciplinary-wide service. The literature and methods have described the importance of placing museum work within research. The participants reveal that it is not the just the quantity of exhibitions, it is also the content that is remembered and influential. In order to create the most informed content, research must act as foundation, or the rudder to steer the ship. The GLBT History Museum's exhibitions in the community gallery change at least once a year as suggested by the community. In the formative years of the museum, the galleries changed more frequently but this did not alter attendance. Knowledgeable practice to create lasting impressions in exhibition takes time. Gurian suggests, "It might be helpful if museums had a checklist that they could use collectively to ascribe a social responsibility score for their institution" (2006, p. 70).

In the area of exhibitions:

- How do we choose exhibition topics?
- What exhibition strategies do we use?

- Are the topics intended to be overt propaganda, covert propaganda, or a personal point of view?
  - Does the exhibition style(s) match the needs of a whole range of learners?
  - Do we use other sensory, nonliterate modalities?
  - Are the exhibition creators made known to the public?
  - Do they include advisors who have divergent points of view?
  - What role have the funders played?
  - Who decides? Who determines the proper answers to these questions?  
(Gurian, 2006, p. 71).
- *Transparency*

The methods have deemed community involvement as a critical way to create authentic storytelling. To achieve this, recruiting for participation and involvement in the project must be done alongside the initial development. This positions the museum outward and brings various identities inward, switching roles to counteract the historic institutional power imbalance. This is done through the museum being as transparent as possible, remaining clear in the ways they wish to produce a story as well as any intentions they might have for the project. Three out of the four participants indicated the importance of transparency with the community, and the necessity to articulate how the museum functions.

- *Facilitation*

The role of the museum as facilitator was highlighted by all four participants. Acting as an archival sponge that captures all the community has to offer and navigates how to translate material into museum quality exhibits. The methods described by the participants inform the practice for the museum to play a collaborative role and share control, resulting in truthful representations and thoughtful partnerships.

- *Bridge building partnerships*

Museum professionals are encouraged to act as a bridge, creating relationships that span the distance between the museum and the community at large. Recruitment of community

members ensure a broader audience through peripheral connections allowing for deeper relationships and rectifying feelings of dismissal from the past. Being this intentional bridge informs both parties without one dominating over the other and allows for true expression. The CAC method repairs and strengthens relationships through collaboration between marginalized histories and inclusion in the physical location where stories can now be told.

- *Accessibility to location/space/time*

Acknowledging the privilege associated with this kind of work is an important part of the methods. Access to location, ability to fill out an application online, space to tell the story, and spare time to commit to the process, are all privileges. The museum asks a great deal of those involved in what they hope to create, therefore the museum must recognize the reciprocal relationship they have with the community. Museums need the community as patrons, attendees, and subject matter experts. This shift in concept will inform changes in the way museums function. The Digital Storytelling Project was offered through free and open source technology, accessible on PCs so the participants were able to access them on their own. They were given permission to use all workshop materials in other spaces so they could recreate the project if they so wished, creating a jumping off point for further education. Making space available to communities—in the form of planning or in the form of actual exhibits—creates exposure and understanding for historically marginalized communities.

The importance of location, space, and time, sheds light on the importance of temporality of one's place in the socio-cultural context. Finding a space to feel safe and authentic is a luxury and as described in the analysis, something the LGBTQ community has historically found in bars. This act of finding an alternative space, safe haven, is similar to the idea of third space feminism, which was created in response to the exclusion of women of color and indigenous

voices within the feminist movement. Although it may not be obvious, there are connections between the idea of third space feminism and the museum's creative acts of resistance of constructed history.

- *Marginalizing the marginalized*

The museum should strive to intentionally acknowledge those marginalized even within an already marginalized context. Every participant mentioned the challenge of lack of stories and omissions in exhibit canons. Both *Revealing Queer* and the GLBT History Museum spoke of discrepancies representing the transgender community, whether due to severe oppression even within the LGBTQ context or just overall lack of material, the transgender experience has been one of overt oppression. Power dynamics are an unfortunate result of oppression, they will always exist and this exemplifies how even in the most oppressed of communities, there can still be signs of internal oppression.

- *Looking ahead*

Most exhibitions pertaining to this topic are historical cartographies. While this is necessary and should definitely hold a place in exhibition narratives, there must also be representations of contemporary experiences. This will indicate the changing community and cultural shifts by acknowledging a current lived life outside traditional social norms. It documents a moment in the museum field where new exhibits help to expose social progress. Mertins et al. (2008) inform the necessity of exhibiting the present as, "It is impossible to determine how the LGBTQ community may have been excluded from the stories told in the average museum experience today unless we challenge how power, social justice and cultural complexity can be incorporated in future studies" (p.83).

- *Valuing yourself, your story, your objects*

Every participant mentioned the challenges of collecting objects, resulting in problems when constructing the narrative. These institutions, exhibition, and projects are all regional endeavors and they exist within the community they represent. Portraying value to a broader range of objects might mean a change in the field's general thinking behind the word "object." Redefining characteristics to help translate how we, as a human race, value objects important to whose stories are being told.

Objects carry a wide range of meanings and purposes. The importance of keeping what is precious safe is particular to each individual. The correlation between a physical object and abstract emotion is a construct museum exhibition authenticates in each story they tell. Piaget said, "Fetishism of commodities, symbolisms of jargon do not represent actual social relations but rather symbolize only the relations between abstract concepts" (Adorno, 2002, p. xiv). Importance is determined at first by those who have created the relationship with the object. Bessant (2010) furthers Piaget's theory of this individualistic relationship as, "Although subjective perceptions may differ from person-to-person, the symbols used to characterize aspects of the surrounding world represent common property. Shared symbols allow individuals to direct their thoughts and actions toward common objects, understandings, and values" (p. 11). The evolving meaning of community and shared perspectives pertain to the relation of ephemeral and physical objects. A reinterpreted theoretical perspective of collections can identify how objects represent truth whether from an individual or community view. This could be done in many forms; one suggestion is opening up collections to more than just the basement of a museum and those who work with them. Creating access points to learn about museum collections and how to care for objects may result in more archived data from individual lives.

While also illustrating the museum's interest in what someone may feel is only important to their story, it can also hold sustenance for others' stories as well.

- *Add to the archive*

The feminist movement and LGBTQ lives are an expansive and unfolding narrative. It is wide, unmanageable, and natural, like the ocean. In order for the museum to reflect and stay relevant to their communities, they must continue to add to their archive. The identified institutions, the exhibit, and project, all gave visitors opportunity to add to the existing narrative. Whether through a social media hashtag or post-its suggesting changes like in *Revealing Queer*, the museum offered opportunities to add experience. Robert commented on this being a main objective for the Digital Storytelling Project: to add to the archive. As incorporating digitized materials continues, this work will create a growing digital database with associative oral histories. This could include oral projects with individuals and their personal objects on their importance and significance. A reinterpretation of already existing archives, not necessarily considered "feminist" or "LGBTQ," but cross-referenced for associations. The growing body of these stories creates a more informed experience and the museums reinterpretation of archival work will do this. "All we can do is make it true, that is why 'Authentic' was first, and then maybe we can make it powerful by showing them something that they remember or they didn't expect, an object or actual artifact where they go, 'Oh, I remember.' You know, it takes them back and it speaks to the authenticity of their experience" (P. Boneberg, personal communication, March 2, 2015).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions & Recommendations**

This work has been a labor of love. The extent to which stories have been silenced and the opportunities to change these omissions, will add to the field. Noticeable gaps of literature on inclusive practices in exhibition shaped the research, in hopes of shedding light on fields in association with museology. The areas of Feminist Studies, Queer Thought, and Museology are contextually relative and grasping these concepts and their interrelations will assist museums in becoming stronger storytellers and educators. It is exciting to be a part of this pivotal time in museums. The field is acknowledging the past while looking ahead, focusing on their power as advocates and allies. This work does not mean to criticize what museums have done in the past, but rather, to show what possibilities lay ahead. The goal of this qualitative exploratory research was to identify and describe emerging models for telling/sharing marginalized stories of female-identified and LGBTQ experience in museum exhibition.

### **Methods**

The methods used to collect data included open-ended, semi-structured interviews with four museum projects, chosen based on their missions to tell historically marginalized stories from the female-identified and/or LGBTQ perspective. Participants interviewed were selected based on the following criteria: direct involvement with the selected exhibition/project and their facilitation of the process from initiation to installation. I approach this topic as activism in the museum field from the perspective of a feminist, academic, activist, museum professional, and ally.

### **Key Results**

Some key results include: using research as a building tool and foundation, not to complicate but to deeply understand without losing nuances. Theory integrated in museum work

creates an interdisciplinary approach that makes sense due to the nature of the museum field itself. Chandra Mohanty (1991) suggests using theory within practice as, “An intellectual and political tool to bridge this gap, with possibilities that exceed its potential as a methodological intervention. We suggest that interweaving theories and practices of knowledge production through collaborative dialogues provides a way to radically rethink existing approaches to subalternity, voice, authorship, and representation” (p.72).

The findings support the value of collaborative dialogue as an informed and proactive approach to doing intersectional museum work. The importance of language is another finding. It is important for museums to make sure all have the same tools and definitions when constructing a narrative and that not everyone “speaks museum,” or feminism, or queer. Therefore, being completely transparent with intentions, criteria and goals, sanctions the methods in a productive and clear way. The museum professionals must listen for silences and gaps in the narrative, what cannot be articulated by objects or what has yet to be said. The museum must maintain reflexivity, awareness, and constant transmission of learning as facilitator. Building bridges, in some cases re-building partnerships to create access. “Museums have the capability to decide what kind of experience the visitor leaves with” (Gurian, 2006, p. 150). This research has revealed a collection of approaches when interpreting personal stories of marginalized experience, specifically the female-identified and LGBTQ identity:

- *Research as Foundation*
- *Transparency*
- *Facilitation*
- *Bridge building partnerships*
- *Accessibility to location/space/time*

- *Marginalizing the marginalized*
- *Look ahead not just at historical data*
- *Valuing yourself, your story, your objects*
- *Leave room to add to the archive*

These outcomes and suggested tools inform the methods used in the exhibition of voices that have been overlooked or ignored by the institution. Museums can help to dismantle injustice, mitigate hate, and reduce prejudice that forms from lack of representation and knowledge.

In order for a boat to float it needs the buoyancy of water. The more museums embrace the value of community investment to their exhibits and harness the winds of change, the farther their boats will sail. Exhibiting the experiences of female-identified and LGBTQ lives is a goldmine of opportunity, defying systematic oppression. Creating space for experiences to be shared will teach us about the past and usher in positive change for the future. Those who identify outside the gender and/or sexual binary have traditionally been shamed into silence, but things are beginning to change. Museums can be part of the vanguard movement of tolerance and celebration. The museum has the capability and resources to offer space, creating room to share all voices. The range of experience, like the ocean, will never be fully contained, but a deep respect for its voices facilitates a partnership. The museum and the community can exist in harmony, as a boat sails across water. The open water presents journeys of discovery, just like museums.

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**APPENDIX****Item I. Interview Protocol**

University of Washington

Researcher's name: Sarah Olivo. 828-551-2392. Email: seo3@uw.edu

Thesis Advisor: Kris Morrissey, Director of the Museology Graduate Program. Phone: 206-685-8207. Email: morriss8@uw.edu.

I am asking you to participate in an interview that is part of my Master's Thesis work at the University of Washington. The purpose of this research is to identify and describe emerging models for telling/sharing marginalized stories of female and queer experiences in museum exhibition. Your participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits, and you may discontinue participation at any time. This interview will be audio taped for my note taking only. I may use your title and name of your institution in my final paper. If I directly quote you, I will send the quote to you before publication. If you have any questions now or in the future, you may contact me through the information on this card. Do you have any questions? Do you agree to participate in this interview?

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**On card or document left with interviewee:**

Storytelling in Museums: Theory to Practice of Exhibition Methods for Identity Based Narratives

University of Washington

Researcher's name: Sarah Olivo. 828-551-2392. Email: seo3@uw.edu

Thesis Advisor: Kris Morrissey, Director of the Museology Graduate Program. Phone: 206-685-8207. Email: morriss8@uw.edu.

Interview Questions:

As the developer of this exhibition and when looking at the initial process, where did the idea for this exhibition come from? And did things change, if so, how?

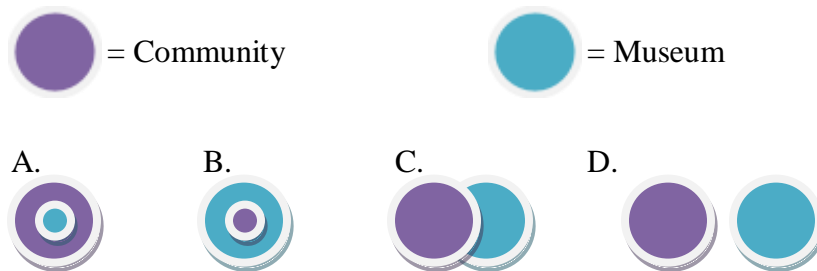
At this time I would like to ask you about the process used to curate and shape the story. Were there any major themes in the exhibition?

Now if we can turn to this quick activity, could you look at these four cards and select the one(s) if any that most represent your philosophy when constructing the exhibition's message? [Card text: Experience, Education, Authenticity, Language.]

Is there a word missing here that you would add?

What type of protocol or process was used to collect stories or information? Did you face any challenges?

When conceptualizing the process of the exhibition, would you please choose from the following four Venn diagrams illustrating the collaboration between the museum and community being represented to create the final product?



How much control would you say community had in the presentation of the exhibition?

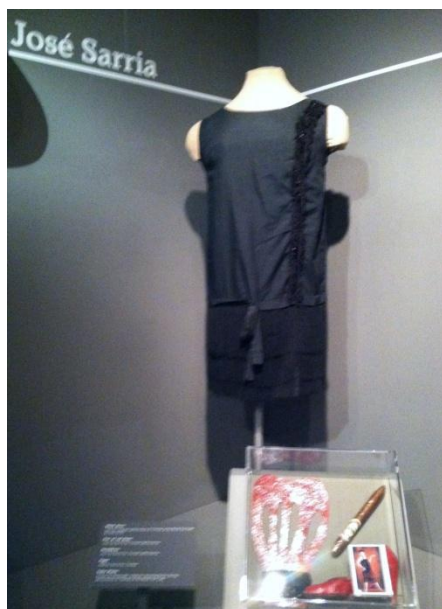
Now turning to your role as Label Writer for the exhibition and the process when selecting the language, did the language change? How did it change?

If so, are there initial archives of the text from the beginning phases? How was the language used in the exhibition finally chosen?

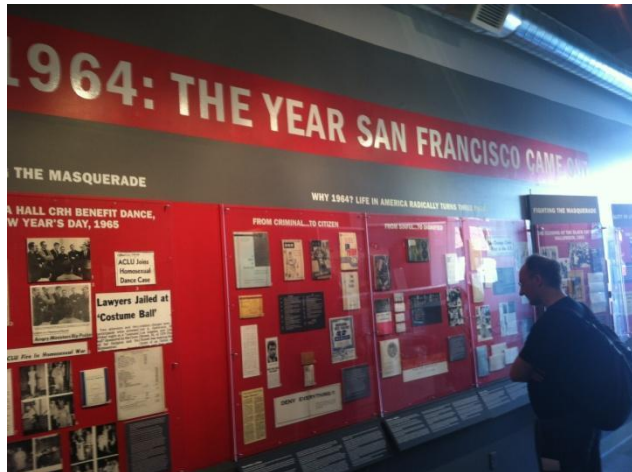
**A. GLBT History Museum**



**A.1. Signage outside the museum**



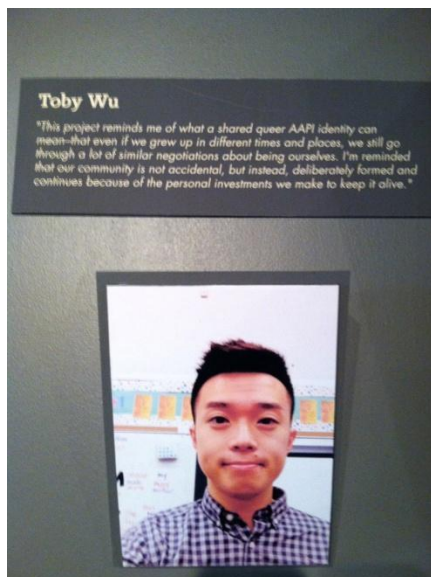
**A.2. José Sarria: Activist and Entertainer**



A.3. 1964: *The Year San Francisco Came Out*



A.4. *History is Now: Dragon Fruit Project*



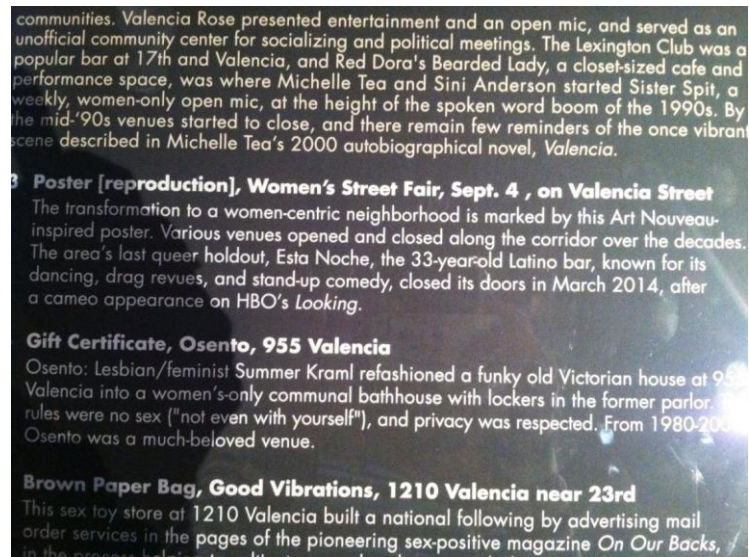
A.5. Testimonial from *Dragon Fruit Project* participant, Toby Wu

now by working together to preserve inspiring stories of courage and defiance against not just homophobia, but also racism, sexism, and poverty. The recorded stories will be stored at the GLBT Historical Society, which currently houses nearly 500 interviews also collected and transcribed by volunteers.

A.6. Closing text panel for *Dragon Fruit Project*



A.7. *Gayborhoods* flyer from festival



### A.8. *Gayborhoods* object descriptions



### A.9. *Gayborhoods* digital screen with rotating personal pictures

**B. The aSHEville Museum**



**B.1. Appalachian Women; Who was Wilma Dykeman?**



**B.2. Appalachian Women objects**



**B.3. Who was Wilma Dykeman? - Text panels** **B.4. Who was Wilma Dykeman? - Regional map**



**B.5. Appalachian Women**

**C. Revealing Queer**



**C.1.** *Revealing Queer*; Exhibition Image