

# Hall of Justice:

2SLGBTQ Activist Poster Series Research Project

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# FOREWORD

Hall of Justice is a participatory action research project in collaboration with emerging youth leaders who are passionate about social justice. Building on my twenty years of experience in involving arts-based methods in social change initiatives and creative responses to oppression, this culminating effort of my studies at York University publicly celebrates the activism of 2SLGBTQ (Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer) people. Hall of Justice builds on my foundational research and writing during my time at York University focusing on arts-based pedagogies of social justice, anti-oppression theory, and histories of creative resistance of 2SLGBTQ people. Specifically, my research at York University has examined contemporary and historical social movements and the work of activists in 2SLGBTQ communities. To date, my community work, art practice, activism, and academic research has explored and implemented methods and practices of challenging injustice. The last decade of my work with youth has focused on challenging homophobia and transphobia, as well as other, intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination, including racism, ableism and classism. Hall of Justice is a poster series that celebrates activists in the 2SLGBTQ communities with a focus on both local and global efforts. This project can positively impact youth by providing reflections of their identities in inspiring contexts within the spaces they frequent. Hall of Justice has the potential for political power as each of these activists bring their concerns of justice to the foreground in the educational poster series. As part of this work, I have

conducted research into the interplay of art and activism within 2SLGBTQ communities, and examined and addressed barriers to youth engagement. The result is a visual, educational, shareable celebration of individuals who inspire 2SLGBTQ youth.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank Sarah Flicker for her constant support and profound kindness throughout my time working with her as a supervisor during my time in the Master's program. I'd also like to thank the faculty members Jin Haritaworn, Chris Cavanagh, Martha Steigman, and Ellie Perkins who were particularly important to my growth and learning while at the university.

At the Sherbourne Health Centre I'd like to thank past and present management and staff; Bev Lepischak, Leslie Chudnovsky, Clare Nobbs, Adam Benn, Verlia Stephens, Kiley May, and Hazelle Palmer, for your support over the years with HEAT. I'd also like to thank the rest of the SOY and SHC team for everything we shared during the eight years that I worked there.

A huge shout out of love and respect to the youth community at SOY, especially those involved in HEAT. You have taught me so much, I am eternally grateful, and hope our connections stay strong for years to come. Extra special love and appreciation for those who were involved in the Youth Advisory Committee; Elton Campbell, Michael Chiimba, Keyshia Corothers, Rebecca Jaine, Faelix Kayn, Alyssa Meyer, Donna Rowshawbin, J Sloat-Spencer, Bailey Syriah, and Vanessa

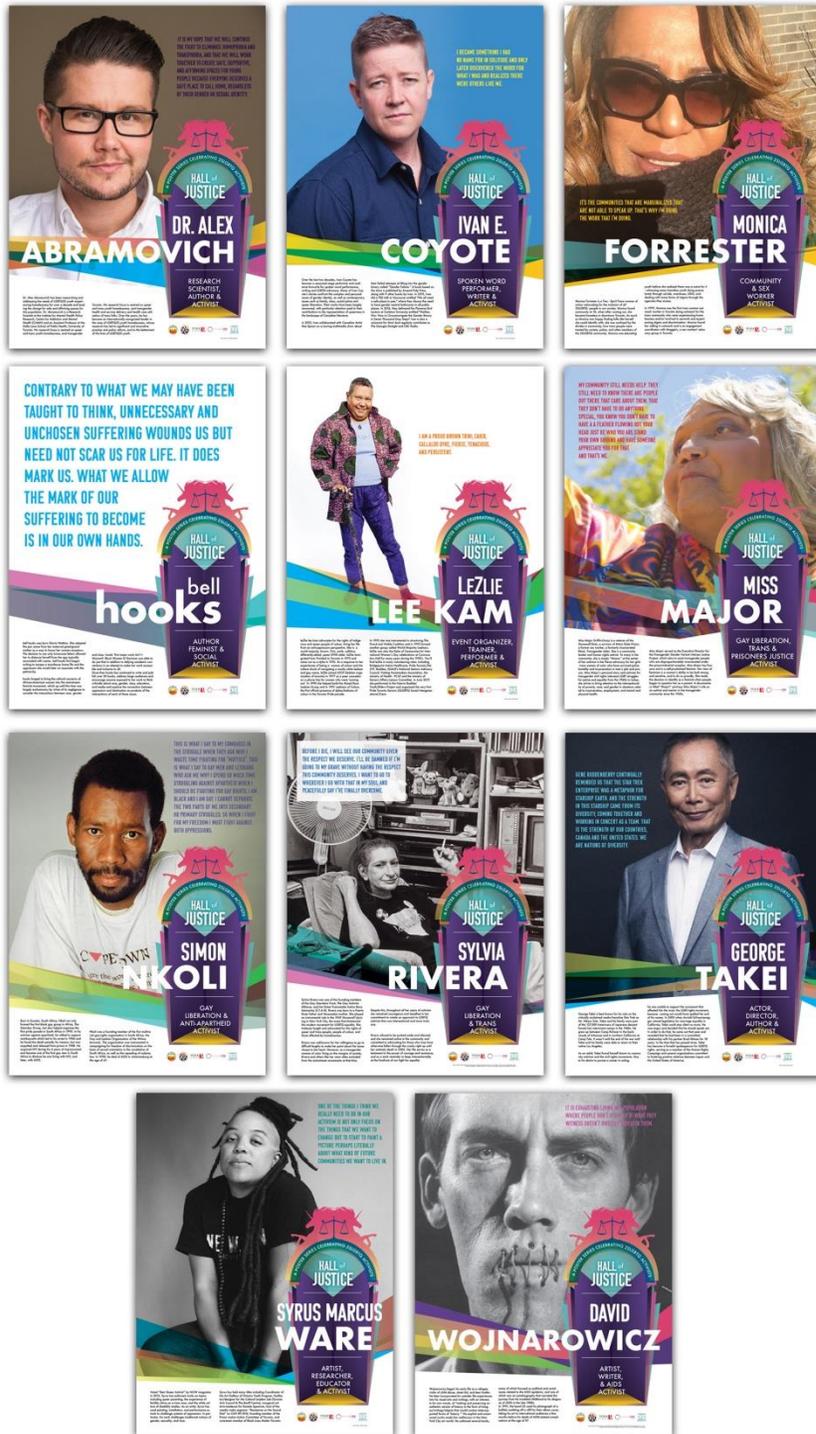
Stirling. Your insight was invaluable. Thank you for your commitment to this work!

To my husband, Ian Macpherson, my deepest gratitude for your constant love and all the ways you have helped me through these last nine years of post-secondary education. We've come a long way baby! Your graphic design work on the poster series is gorgeous, I'm so fortunate to have an in-house designer to collaborate with. I cherish that I have someone to share my life with who cares as deeply about social justice as I do.

Thank you to all my family, with special thanks to my Mom who modelled that you can pursue education at any age, instilled the values I hold deeply today, and has always believed that I could do whatever I set my sights on.

Thank you to Katherine Heung and Nick Davies for editing my work at a time when I was really stuck, your contribution was huge in helping me clarify my ideas. Huge appreciation to the Community One Foundation for providing me the financial support to produce this work.

Lastly, I owe my life to the profoundly meaningful activism of Alex Abramovich, Ivan E Coyote, Monica Forrester, bell hooks, LeZlie Lee Kam, Miss Major, Simon Nkoli, Syliva Rivera, George Takei, Syrus Ware, and David Wojnarowicz.



Hall of Justice 2SLGBTQ Activist Poster Series

# BEGINNINGS

My family are settlers on Turtle Island. I begin acknowledging that where I live and work is on Indigenous land. I was born in Hamilton, Ontario, into a low-income and working-class family. Before I was a year old, my mother left with me in the night to escape physical and emotional abuse from my father who struggled with addictions. My parents were divorced by the time I was two years old. As I began my journey in the school system, children began othering me by the time I was seven years old when they read me as effeminate or gay. I was teased for the ways in which I didn't conform to conventions of masculinity and had difficulty navigating school as a feminine boy. My time at elementary school began in 1983 which coincided with the beginning of the international HIV/AIDS epidemic which amplified homophobia as socially accepted. Long before I had any sense of my own sexuality, the children in my school knew I was different from them and they bullied me for years because of it.

Part of the motivation to do the work that I do with young people who identify as 2SLGBTQ stems from these early experiences. Children often talk about sex and sexuality in the school yards far away from staff who can provide education and support on the subject. The impact of the lack of systemic support plays out in childhood bullying, offensive jokes, and othering. The roll out of the updated sex education curriculum in Ontario and the push back against it under the argument that our children are not ready to discuss these matters is a harmful one.

Without the education, it leaves children to be exposed to misinformation and

harm in relation to sex and sexuality for years before any education and support are provided.

These experiences worsened for me as I went through puberty and entered high school. I went through a time of being a pariah. The bullying turned violent and increased to an almost daily experience. There were faculty in my Catholic high school who would make homophobic remarks that would not only cause their own distinct harm, but also validate the behavior of my peers and leave me feeling unsafe in the classroom. At home I experienced rejection from family. I went into a depression and began attempting suicide. I struggled with finding a place to live from the age of sixteen. Finding employment to enter the workforce was highly difficult in a depressed Hamilton economy as the industry of the city was gutted during the Mike Harris era. I relied on welfare to pay rent for several years as I worked to finish high school.

When I was sixteen years old, two strangers who saw me on a city bus physically assaulted me while yelling homophobic slurs for an hour during the middle of the day on a busy Hamilton street. I would later in life view this as my most brutal experience of the bystander phenomenon, a term in social psychology that illustrates the public's increased disinclination to intervene if other people are visible. They beat me so badly that a kick to my shoulder stunted the bone and I grew a tumor. I struggled to manage the emotional and physical pain I was encountering regularly and the anxiety of feeling unsafe in my city. Just prior to

turning twenty, after coming out to my father and experiencing complete rejection from him, I attempted suicide again and ended up in a coma for a week.

Thankfully, I awakened with a will to live, these combined experiences of homophobia led me to leave Hamilton and seek out 2SLGBTQ community in Toronto.

## FINDING COMMUNITY

In my early twenties, I began to have friendships within the arts community and amongst 2SLGBTQ people, but primarily lesbians and gays at the time. Both the arts and 2SLGBTQ community's acceptance of me were profoundly significant in establishing a sense of belonging in the city. In terms of class struggle, I found myself still struggling financially and relied on sex work to survive for a few years. I was living in a communal household with anti-poverty activists and artists and it was in this period that I recognized the importance of the arts as a means for oppressed people to express themselves in a world where dominant forces work to silence the marginalized. In the year 2000, I began go-go dancing at Vaseline, a monthly Queer rock and roll party called Vaseline, the brainchild of my friend Will Munro, an artist, event promoter, and community organizer. The event brought together art and politics in a way that was significantly transformative for me. It provided an immersion in radical queer expression, a place where outsiders connected, and where I really started to experience the benefits of community and having relationships with others who share aspects of my

identity. This inspired me to start a queer art-collective / band called Kids on TV that I was in for 10 years from 2003-2013. I generally wrote lyrics about queer experiences and people. I was focused on Queer hidden histories and bringing those stories into the light and to our international audiences via touring, releasing music, and videos. This was a time of beginning to understand Queer as a reclaimed identity; it was my initial exposure to Queer Theory. I started to understand how the larger systemic issues of homophobia were related to the interpersonal experiences I had. It would carry these threads of engagement with the arts, fascination with activism, and a desire to chronicle and share queer stories, into my studies.

## WORKING IN COMMUNITY

In my personal exploration during my mid-twenties, I developed a deeper interest in the intersections of art and activism and began searching for ways that I could support those initiatives. I volunteered at various community organizations and found the work to be meaningful and rewarding. I became employed at SKETCH, an artist studio for homeless and street-involved youth which became the chrysalis for my practice of using arts-based methods in community work. I was surrounded by youth struggling in poverty who were creating powerful and political artistic work addressing the barriers that they were encountering in their lives. This experience helped me realize the skills I have in this line of work and that I also had much to learn.

I enrolled in the Community Worker program at George Brown College. It was the first time that I had the experience of a curriculum feeling highly relevant to my life and my passions. I learned from the professors, my peers, the literature, and my placement work in the field. The community worker program at George Brown College provided an opportunity to spend two years dedicated to learning about working with oppressed communities to empower themselves. It felt like a catapult launching me into working in the sector.

## HEAT

While I was a student in the Community Worker program, I did a year-long placement at Supporting Our Youth (SOY). SOY is a community development program based out of the Sherbourne Health Centre, “a leading provider of quality healthcare and transformative support to those who face social, economic and other systemic barriers in the heart of Toronto’s high-need downtown neighbourhoods” (Sherbourne, 2017). SOY works to improve the lives of LGBTQ2S youth by creating activities with young people that build skills and capacities and provides access to supportive adult mentors. Here I was confronted with the myriad of barriers 2SLGBTQ youth experience and the ways in which our society and institutions are harmful for them. In response, I conceptualized a new program called HEAT (Human Rights Equity Access Team) to train and empower 2SLGBTQ youth to be speakers, trainers,



“Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times, that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things”.

This concept was integral to our understanding of anti-oppression and so HEAT created a short educational video titled “Kids Explain Intersectionality” which has young people teaching each other the concept like a game of telephone. This was created to demonstrate the readiness of young people to engage with these ideas. The HEAT anti-oppression curriculum includes a range of topics including; sex, class, race, ability, age, colonization, Two-Spirit identity, mental wellness, physical body, immigration and migration, the justice system, intersectionality and community.



HEAT speaker's bureau 2015

Youth self-select and engage in an intensive 30-week training session that helps them to explore social justice issues and anti-oppressive practice. They drive the specific curriculum of that training themselves and are involved with shaping the wider program. Youth from previous intakes mentor the new starters and start to facilitate workshops and give presentations. The program is free, TTC tokens are provided to make it more accessible, dinner and refreshments are provided to ensure people are nourished and physically able to engage in learning and unlearning. The location is fully accessible including elevators with audio announcements and braille, and ASL interpretation is provided for deaf participants. In contrast with post-secondary institutions which require students to pay to learn, within the HEAT program they receive honoraria at various stages of completion of their training to honour their time and commitment to learning

and educating peers.

Graduates of the program have the option to join the speaker's bureau wherein youth talk directly to a range of audiences to highlight the challenges facing 2SLGBTQ youth and their peers today, as well as what needs to change. They offer guidance on how to implement and support tangible initiatives to create safe, anti-oppressive and more welcoming environments for all youth. Speakers share their own personal experiences and knowledge of not just homophobia and transphobia, but of intersecting issues such as racism, ableism and other forms of oppression and discrimination.

There are currently over thirty active graduated HEAT youth, most aged 19-25, many of whom have been with the group since the beginning. They have given dozens of presentations to elementary and high schools, colleges and universities, employers and service-providers. They identify as queer and trans activists, 'artists' and/or advocates, and many also volunteer, study or work in other roles that support the human rights climate and anti-oppressive efforts within communities.



Erin Edghill delivers a talk to elementary school students in Toronto in 2014

Over the past seven years HEAT has helped to achieve a strengthened community with a common understanding of anti-oppressive practice that is safer, more receptive to, and welcoming for 2SLGBTQ youth. They have reached thousands of community members through over one hundred presentations, workshops and media appearances. 132 youth have participated in the training program to date. The group act as important role models, and reflect the immense diversity within the 2SLGBTQ community itself – including youth from across the spectrum of sexuality, gender, race, ability, and experiences such as homelessness.

HEAT regularly receives feedback from audiences that they are generating important awareness, and supporting personal and institutional change – reaching people and changing attitudes in unique and effective ways. One

Toronto District School Board employee commented, “The connection to personal stories sensitizes people in a different way – and it’s an awareness that leads to change... As an educator I felt, ‘here’s what I can do and here’s why I’m doing it’.”

Youth attribute increased skills, confidence, opportunities and results to their participation, including obtaining grants and employment and getting back into education. Both audiences and youth participants regularly cite the program as making positive changes to their attitudes, interactions and opportunities. Youth drive the program, working together respectfully and collaboratively with an emphasis on an anti-oppressive framework and peer-to-peer mentoring, and they engage their audiences creatively through games, quizzes and small group-work, as well as through their personal stories.

As I worked to establish the HEAT program I sought out more ways to bridge creative expression and activism. I enrolled part-time in the Community Arts Practice Certificate (CAP) at York University while I worked at SOY and smaller contract positions at various arts organizations. The CAP program exposed me to more critical thinking on the practice of using art-based methods in community work. The faculty, peers, and readings within the program inspired me to continue to use art as a means of disrupting hegemonic realities. I utilized my positions as a community worker and researcher and the valuable feedback loop of praxis and practice that this dynamic generates. I used my academic course

assignments and requirements to reflect on the complexities of my community work. This enrichment of my reflexive practice felt like a privilege that the role at SOY often does not allow for in such a thoughtful method. I used my time at York University to research areas for innovation in the program and critically reflect on the challenges coordinating a social justice education and training program in a community based health centre environment.

While enrolled in the CAP Certificate program I realized that the Faculty of Environmental Studies accepted non-standard entries like myself. My community worker diploma combined with the CAP certificate I had resulted in four years of formal education. But I was considered “non-standard” because I did not have a bachelor’s degree. I appreciated that the department of Environmental Studies recognizes and respects different educational paths. I was also drawn to FES because my sense was that there was a strong social justice stream supported by course offerings. In addition, I knew of Queer and Trans folks that I respected doing work in the department.

An emphasis on cultural, social, political, and economic critiques from both within and outside of the 2SLGBTQ community are vital to elaborating my work. In the interest of honing my capacity as a community organizer and activist, I delved into how communities have historically resisted oppressive forces and what strategies were proving to be effective in contemporary times. Working at SOY pushes me to find content to share with the youth that builds links to historical

movements. SOY has provided me an in-depth opportunity to see the ways the 2SLGBTQ youth community is organizing and the ways in which their creative acts are pushing up against homophobia and transphobia.

My experience and research has helped me to gain a strong working knowledge of how 2SLGBTQ communities have used arts-based methods to create awareness about the need for social change. The creative methods and techniques that 2SLGBTQ communities have utilized in their efforts for social change are as wide ranging as the arts, examples include the creation of performance, music, film and video, visual art, and wearable items that highlight the struggles communities are facing. Some highlights include the work of General Idea addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the music of Sylvester who challenged traditional gender presentation in the 1970s, and the poetry of Vivek Shraya which addressed issues of race, religion, sexuality, and gender. Within community arts, the process of creating together is key to building relationships across difference and giving voice to marginalized people. The creative resistance of 2SLGBTQ communities has been vital in achieving great strides in helping larger society shift from a heteronormative and cisnormative framework and making space for 2SLGBTQ individuals to live freely and thrive.

## GENESIS AND DESIGN

I enrolled in the Masters of Environmental Studies program because I wanted to learn more about engaging youth in social justice work and specialize in anti-oppression theory, arts based pedagogies of social justice, and histories of 2SLGBTQ creative resistance. Specifically, my research explores contemporary and historical social movements and the work of activists in 2SLGBTQ communities locally and globally. The culmination of my studies resulted in the decision to coordinate and produce a major project titled *Hall of Justice* a poster series that honours those 2SLGBTQ individuals who have been instrumental in creating positive social change. This research intentionally avoids the study of 2SLGBTQ youth; I believe the population is over-studied and often the practices are extractive, with few rewards returning to the youth, resulting in “finger shaped bruises on our pulse points”. (Tuck p.412) Inspired by the work of Eve Tuck, *Hall of Justice* utilizes a desire based framework because it is “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives.” (Tuck. P416)

Layered on the desire based framework, the project also works within a participatory action research framework; “PAR attempts to forge collaborative research relationships in which community partners take an active role in studying problems alongside a traditional researcher to develop strategies for change”. (Gubrium and Harper. p 30) To distance this project from participatory research and interventions that are exploitative of young people, I had to contemplate a question Claudia Mitchell proposes; “How can we ensure that

research with marginalized populations does not further marginalize them, or worse, endanger their lives, by putting them in a more vulnerable position than they might have been as a result of our participatory research”. (Mitchell p. 30)

By positioning the youth as experts rather than subjects, and exploring their visions of justice and success rather than personal hardships, this project avoids the pitfalls of exploitative participatory action research.

The shared process that youth from HEAT have undergone in the leadership and anti-oppression training have prepared them to critically look at the advances the 2SLGBTQ community. HEAT members have expanded their knowledge of what struggles persist in contemporary society and collaboratively created artwork that reflects these realities. My aim with this project is to produce materials that inspire and support 2SLGBTQ youth in their mobilization efforts to broaden equity and inclusivity. Building on Deborah Britzman’s theories of Queer Pedagogy, this is “an ethical project that begins to engage difference as the grounds of politicality and community”. (Britzman. p152) It is my hope that the interplay between art and activism can generate a more engaged youth citizenry. Feminist and Community Arts Scholar Dian Marino (1998) speaks to the power of art in social justice. “Artistic work can merely mirror prevailing structures, or it can reflect and re:frame how we see our experiences. The development of alternative educational material – a different kind of art education – can sow the seeds for re:framing for revolutionary perspective, especially within our North

American context, which is so saturated with the imagery and sounds of the dominant class. (Marino p. 99)

Hall of Justice provides an opportunity for 2SLGBTQ youth to develop educational material that allows for re:framing for revolutionary perspective. In my career at SOY, the youth have consistently demonstrated a need for connection to mentors and knowledge of 2SLGBTQ accomplishments. This thirst for information about elders has inspired me to develop the poster project. This project is designed as a collaboration with youth that would create sharable resources that raise awareness of 2SLGBTQ activism. This project aligns with my long-term work to engage youth in social change and work on creative responses to oppression. It was inspired in part by the work of Deborah Barndt (2006) who argues “artmaking that ignites people’s creativity, recovers repressed histories, builds community and strengthens social movements is in itself a holistic form of action”. (Barndt. p18) For the purposes of this PAR project, HEAT played the role of an advisory committee to unpack how 2SLGBTQ communities have been impactful at challenging oppression with priority given to the hidden histories, and those that have not had intended effect or impact but have contributed to positive social change. This research creates a space for innovation by moving beyond the training program already in place within SOY and working with HEAT to explore arts-based methods and deepen collective knowledge of effective 2SLGBTQ activism.

The opportunity to work in the community while immersed in an academic program has provided a positive feedback loop of praxis and practice. There was a tension holding two roles in this process that became apparent when it came time to determine how youth would be compensated during the process of pursuing my ethics review. Largely this combined role was beneficial because it avoided the type of situations wherein researchers parachute into a community. In Hall of Justice, relationships had grown over the years of involvement with HEAT and trust was established. The youth had already gone through a collective experience of in-depth training and so had a shared language and sense of values and purpose. This meant that the group came with a readiness, and although this was a new project, we bypassed the steps commonly used to establish a working group. The challenge that emerged in holding multiple roles was when the approach I employ as program coordinator at SOY to provide youth compensation contrasted with the expectations of researchers to provide compensation to participants. At SOY, I strive to find speaking opportunities for the youth in the speaker's bureau in the range of seventy-five to one-hundred dollars per person for a commitment. It is my goal to get youth speakers an honouraria that recognizes their value from the institutions that are interested in youth perspective and expertise. This is contrasted with my role as an Environmental Studies researcher which requires accordance with the ethics obligations and avoiding coercion. As a result, I felt morally obligated to offer a small honourarium. I was new to this academic research realm and had been advised that a forty dollar honourarium may be experienced as coercive. I

considered the disappointing idea that perhaps that this is the standard within the system of valuing youth participation within research. To encourage the participation of professionals, larger honouraria are often offered without ethical concern. This is a way of that the academic system is decentering and devaluing youth perspectives and expertise in research studies that are youth focused. I questioned the potential commodification of “youth engagement”. My internal conflict was heightened because I am the one to benefit most greatly from the outcomes of this major project. I’m in a funded university program and have received two years of paid education, beyond that this project and masters credential will further my career. My recommendation for researchers would be to account for the context of compensation of youth and avoid a standardized approach which would allow for youth expertise to be valued in our collective process of furthering our understanding of youth experiences.

## CREATION PROCESS

It was my responsibility to ensure that we had enough data to enrich each of the portrayals on the posters. I worked with HEAT participants to initially expand the list, to imagine all who could possibly be celebrated in the series, and eventually narrow to determine which figures reflect the diversity of the community, a

diversity of activist tactics and methods, and depict a range of historical and contemporary groups and individuals. It was important to examine the shortlist and determine if they were complimentary as a series and then finalize the selection of artists and activists for the poster series. The youth advisory committee brainstormed, edited, collated, discussed, and informed and decided what quotes, facts, and images make up the poster content and determine the aesthetic design of the series. The Youth Advisory Committee was Elton Campbell, Keyshia Corothers, Michael Chiimba, Rebecca Jaine, Faelix Kayn, Alyssa Meyer, Donna Rowshawbin, J Sloat-Spencer, Syriah Bailey, and Vanessa Stirling. My role entailed organizing the meetings for the youth advisory committee, providing any direct support for youth participants, coordinating source imagery and information and arranging permissions for image usage, creating the design drafts, and managing the printing.

I worked with the HEAT speaker's bureau to explore: who has been instrumental at effecting positive change in our communities? The design of the project entailed four two-hour meetings with youth that occurred during Pride Month in June of 2017. Youth from HEAT replied to a call-out and self-selected to participate. Together they acted as an advisory committee that informed key decisions about the project. HEAT participants were responsible for determining the final selection of subjects to be honoured and what content would be important to highlight in the poster series. The project involved multiple iterations of listing and prioritizing. For example, my plan for each session included:

1. **Brainstorming Meeting:** Together we will make a big list of LGBTQ2S activists around the world who have made a difference in their communities.
2. **Picking Meeting:** We will pick (and rank) our top 10 activists to turn into posters.
3. **Gathering Meeting:** We will look at information and pictures about each poster candidate and decide what to put on each poster.
4. **Designing Meeting:** We will talk about poster drafts and how to make them better.

## HALL OF JUSTICE

### LGBTQ2S ACTIVIST POSTER SERIES

### RESEARCH PROJECT





Contact John Caffery  
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I want us to work together to answer the question: *how have LGBTQ2S communities challenged oppression*. I want us to use this info to create 5-10 posters that celebrate LGBTQ2S activism. I am doing this as part of my master's research to inspire youth to fight the injustices they see and experience.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** You will be part of a group of advisors that helps me make this project happen. *We will meet four times from May-June on Wednesdays from 5:30-7:30 PM.* At each session, we will have some ice-breakers and food and try to make some decisions as a group.

1. **Brainstorming (May 10 2016):** Together we will make a big list of LGBTQ2S activists around the world who have made a difference in their communities.
2. **Picking (May 17 2016):** We will pick (and rank) our top 10 activists to turn into posters.
3. **Gathering (May 31 2016):** We will look at information and pictures about each poster candidate and decide what to put on each poster.
4. **Designing (Jun 14 2016):** We will talk about poster drafts and how to make them better.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:**

- We will celebrate our community and its activist wins!
- You will participate in creating education materials!
- You may learn new things about our community and history
- You may get some new skills in poster design and community building
- A certificate of completion as a project advisor (you can put this on your resume!)
- Snacks and refreshments
- Receive one \$10 gift card plus two TTC tokens at each meeting

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher (John Caffery), HEAT, Supporting Our Youth, Sherbourne Health Centre, or York University. A verbal reminder of voluntary participation and withdrawal will be shared at the beginning of each session. Your participation has no impact on accessing services at Supporting Our Youth, Sherbourne Health Centre, or York University.

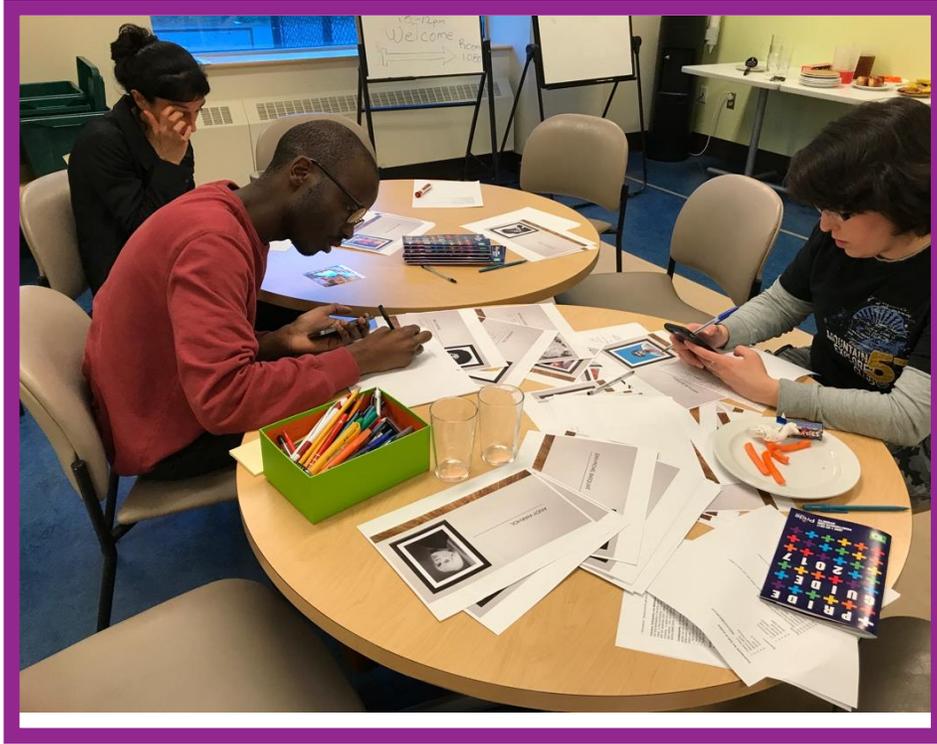
During Pride month when the sessions with the youth advisory committee occurred, I wrote and reflected on the process throughout the project. Working from an anti-oppressive framework demands the ongoing examination of my own

social location and how it informs and impacts the relationships and research. Popular Education Scholar Chris Cavanagh addresses this in his writing (2006) “A popular educator’s responsibility to facilitate access to the full range of means of communication necessitates a critical consciousness”. (Cavanagh. p72) A reflexive journaling method was a key factor in having that personal space as well as the clinical supervision I accessed with my LGBTQ Community Programs team at Sherbourne Health Centre.

## BRAINSTORMING

The preparation for the meeting with the youth advisory committee involved the collection of current and historical stories, facts, documentation, and artwork about 2SLGBTQ activism from the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, Toronto libraries, community historians, online sources as well as drawing from my own knowledge of important social movements and activists. 2SLGBTQ communities are identity-based groups that influence and inspire each other across state lines and borders. Therefore, figures and events were drawn from a combination of contemporary and historical issues and subjects on local, national, and international scales. The Youth Advisory Committee members present were Elton Campbell, Michael Chiimba, Rebecca Jaine, Faelix Kayn, Donna Row, and J Sloat-Spencer. I think the highlight of this brainstorming session was Michael Chiimba flipping through the images of 2SLGBTQ activists and sharing with the group “I have so many new heroes now”. For him to then go on to take time to research the names and fill in important facts about the various individuals

crystalized the purpose of the project. Most of the people I had generated for the brainstorm seemed unfamiliar to the group so there was a lot of explaining why each of the people stood out for me.



Youth Advisory Committee members brainstorming and researching

A challenging moment was when Faelix Kayn arrived and immediately began to write “rapist” on the slide I had created for Christian Milloy and then wrote accused of rape on the slide for Brent Hawkes. This happened in their first few minutes at the table and it was jarring. I was unsure if I was going to witness everyone I had selected be crossed out for problematic reasons. I think there was an inevitability to this as we examine the flaws of the people we consider celebrating. Some folks had to go early so we skipped the icebreaker and got right into the brainstorming. Approximately one hundred people were

brainstormed creating a tough selection process. There was a suggestion to highlight some of the lesbian women who were part of the response to the HIV/AIDS crisis given the amount of gay men who were already suggested. There was also attention paid to how many of these people identify as intersex or ways other than Lesbian, Gay, and Trans.

It was a somewhat anxiety provoking experience as I'm more comfortable facilitating as a team, and that because it is my research I feel awkwardly centered in the process of collaboration. I did get the sense that people were interested to continue to brainstorm beyond the two-hour session which was promising. I think it was difficult for some to fully participate because they didn't recognize most of the activists and two hours didn't provide enough time to fully read through all the content.

## PICKING

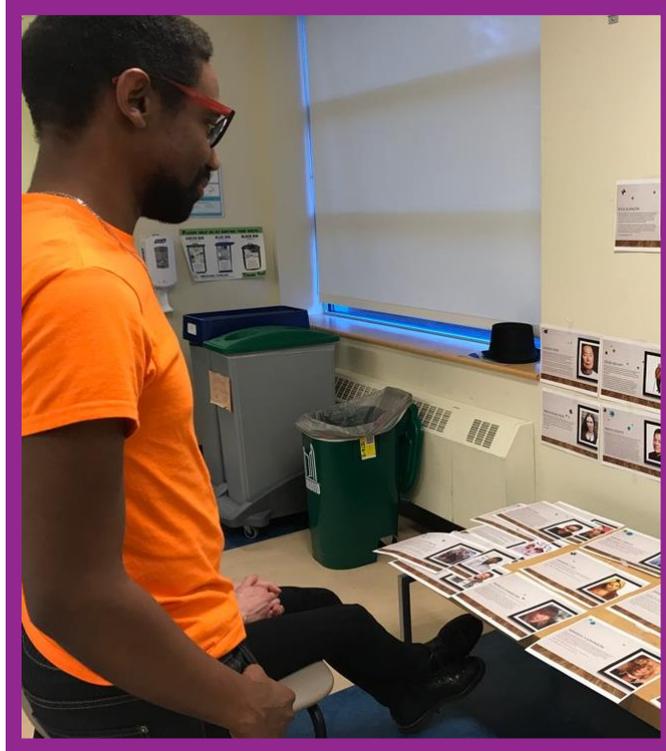
The second session was successful although members of the Youth Advisory Committee were slow to arrive for the evening and it was a smaller group of three, Elton Campbell, Keyshia Corothers , and J Sloat-Spencer. The brainstorm generated many contenders for the project. I created approximately one hundred profiles that featured a photograph and some information about the each of the subjects. These profiles wallpapered the room we were working in. It was massive in scale and there was a lot to sort through and absorb. We used a process of "dot-mocracy" wherein each of us had 15 stickers to vote with.



Some of the profiles in the picking session for Hall of Justice

From there we eliminated everyone that had no stickers which left us with a group of forty-two people to sort through for round two. We then narrowed it down further to people who had more than two votes which brought the selection down to a group of twenty. From there we easily selected people like Miss Major, Syrus Ware, Ivan E. Coyote, and a few others who had lots of votes to be included. At this stage, youth expressed how deeply they felt about the inclusion of activists as they related to their own struggles and identities. There was generative discussion within the group about each activist and what they represented and why these activists were important to highlight within our current political context. Poet and activist Audre Lorde (1983) writes about working together and helping others to feel the inconsistencies and horrors of our lives as a form of protest “If we feel deeply, and we encourage ourselves and others to feel deeply, we will find the germ of our answer to bring about change”. (Lorde. p2) It was important to examine the shortlist and determine if they were

complimentary as a series and then finalize the selection of artists and activists for the poster series.



Elton Campbell deciding whom to include in the Hall of Justice

We then had a thoughtful discussion about the make-up of the group. There was discussion about disability representation and how LeZlie Lee Kam who lives with mobility challenges was a brilliant disability rights activist. Some youth found this stage to be more challenging than the brainstorm, while others found this stage to be very fun. It was a hard choice between including Marsha P Johnson or Silvia Rivera given that their lives and activist work were so interwoven. The group decided that given the lack of representation from Latinx communities in our selection that Rivera would be important to include. In the end, we could not narrow it down to 10 people and ended up with a magnificent group of twelve.

1. *Alex Abramovich*
2. *Ivan E Coyote*
3. *bell hooks*
4. *LeZlie Lee Kam*
5. *Miss Major*
6. *Kent Monkman*
7. *Simon Nkoli*
8. *Sylvia Rivera*
9. *Mihra Soleil-Ross*
10. *George Takei*
11. *Syrus Marcus Ware*
12. *David Wojnarowicz*



Jay Sloat-Spencer examining some of the major list of activists

# GATHERING

The third session was focused on gathering information about the final list of activists. Together we searched through books and the web to find images for use in the poster series and for quotes and data that we could use to profile the people we selected. Three Youth Advisory Committee members were in attendance, Elton Campbell, Donna Rowe, and Alyssa Meyer showed up for the session this day. Elton Campbell shared the “goodreads” website which was great for finding quotes from our twelve activists. Two challenges arose in the session that evening, the first being that there was too much information to collect in a session. Although we did gather some information about every subject, we didn’t gather enough about everyone.

The other challenge that arose in the session was that Alyssa Meyers suggested digital portraits would be a beautiful look aesthetically and provide consistency for the series. The others in the youth advisory committee liked this suggestion. The time limits of my requirements for York University make that effort nearly impossible. To try and source an illustrator and have them finish twelve posters that all were happy with by the end of the summer was too difficult a task. As well, given that the funding awarded to the project from the Community One foundation was for fifteen hundred dollars, there would not be the resources for more than fifty dollars per portrait to offer and that is very low to pay an artist. That meant that after contemplating the idea, I had to inform the group that the digital portraits are not feasible for this project given the budget and timeline.

On a positive note, the youth did comment that they appreciated getting to know the subjects better through this process of collective research. They enjoyed sharing quotes and photos with each other as well as highlighting some of the lesser known (at least to our group) aspects of their activist work, like Mira Soleil-Ross being an animal activist or Simon Nkoli's important work within the anti-apartheid movement and collaboration with Nelson Mandela. This gathering process helped the group see our subjects more fully and examine the complexities of their identity and their struggles.

## DESIGNING

This final gathering was the session to focus on the poster design. The turnout for this session was disappointing and only one person, Donna Rowe attended the session. This meant that there were no youth advisory committee members at every session. Several people attended three of four sessions but that ability to dedicate fully wasn't possible. Perhaps scheduling the session three days after Pride weekend was too close and people hadn't had rest and recovery time. Another possible explanation is that generally when I reach out to the HEAT speakers bureau it is for opportunities that offer higher compensation. This is where the challenge of dual roles as researcher and staff came at odds in relation to the ethics requirements. I couldn't help but think that if people were being compensated like they would normally for HEAT affiliated activities that it would have positively impacted participation. Thankfully the person who did come out had lots to offer in the way of feedback. Decisions were made that a

short biographical paragraph detailing their legacies was important. There were a range of mock ups created that generated a discussion about which drafts provided too much content and which seemed too spare and lacked detail. A decision was made that it was important to include a quote from the subject to inform viewers about how the person viewed the world. An additional design decision was made that one strong photographic image was better than a collage approach for this project. At a later stage in the project Syriah Bailey, Donna Row, and Vanessa Stirling and I co-authored the bios that are included in the posters.

A pedagogical challenge that arose in the design and layout process after the four meetings was whether having a title that described their activism was helpful. The youth advisory committee explored this issue over email. Do we list all the types of activism each of the people participated in? Do labels clarify or limit how we think of these activists? Do we use the term 2SLGBTQ activism on all posters? What if someone passed away twenty years ago and the term at the time was gay liberation? Do we apply our current language or use what was relevant at the time? For example, in the case of Miss Major “Trans Activist, Prison Abolitionist, and Community Leader”. What highlights of their activist careers were most relevant? Again, in the case of Miss Major - Stonewall Riots Activist? Executive Director of the TGIJP? Attica Prison survivor? We are a community that has frequently grappled with labels and so it was a rich

conversation that resulted in the decisions to use the language of the time and to attempt to list the types of activism that each of the subjects focused on.

## SOURCING IMAGERY

The process of acquiring permissions and photographs from the subjects proved to have the greatest challenges and points of inspiration of the project. Initially I went to the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives and acquired some leads as to where I could source quality imagery for our final list of activists but ultimately was unsuccessful when I followed through. Media sources were altogether unresponsive or very slow, even when I had the date of print, issue number, and other pertinent information, the publications database didn't go back to the 1990's. I reached out to online sources that had images of an activist on our list but found they were also unresponsive. The process of waiting for responses negatively impacted the momentum of the project. This challenge resulted in reaching out to each of the subjects personally and seeking their permission to be featured in this poster series. I asked them each to provide a photo for usage in the project. The process began in July of 2017 and initially, Syrus Ware, Ivan E Coyote, and Alex Abramovich all quickly responded positively. The issue of photo quality soon became an issue as I needed to have source material that was of a quality that could be blown up to an 18 x 24 poster. This required some back and forth communications with the subjects in order to meet the needs of the project. Some of the activists replied after four or five attempts of reaching out. LeZlie

Lee Kam connected with me at a coffee shop and provided imagery. I connected with Tim McCaskell who was a friend of Simon Nkoli's and had many photos of his that he permitted me to use. This was followed by a positive response from George Tekai's representatives who shared that "Empowering the LGBT youth is something George is very passionate about". George marked the inclusion of arguably the highest profile subject in the project. In early September, Miss Major replied and said she was wanted to speak with me about the project. I had the good fortune to share a twenty-minute phone conversation with her in which she spoke on her family style approach to community organizing that was profoundly inspiring for me personally. This was followed by the estate of David Wojnarowicz permitting the usage of David's photographic work Silence = Death which is a powerful and political image addressing the lack of information sharing and dialogue in the AIDS epidemic. At this stage, the roster of activists included eight people and was looking diverse in terms of identity, activist tactics, and priorities.

A new challenge materialized which was connecting with the elusive subject. Over a period of four months nearly everyone I reached out to responded. Both Kent Monkman and Mihra Soleil Ross were unresponsive to my communications, I had been warned about the difficulty of reaching Mirha Soleil Ross as she was known to be reclusive and this was a factor I had to accept as something I could not change. As well, the search for a quality high resolution image of Sylvia Rivera continued to be fruitless. This meant that the decision making that the

youth advisory committee did in terms of selecting how these activists fit together and how they reflect our diverse 2SLGBTQ communities had shifted. The loss of Two Spirit and Latinx identities was particularly important. In response, I reviewed the short list of activists before the youth advisory committee had made their final decisions and decided to inform the youth of the situation. I offered the suggestion of including Monica Forrester, a Two Spirit, Black, sex worker activist who was in our list of twenty but didn't get selected to be in the final twelve. The response was positive from the youth who were happy to see her inclusion. I reached out to Monica directly and she shared "I am so proud of the youth that see the need to acknowledge a Transwoman that has made marginalized Trans people a priority and platform when society doesn't see it the same way."

In the fifth month of searching for photographs and permissions from the subjects the search had to be deprioritized as MES deadlines were approaching and the project had to move forward. I found myself grappling with my own ambitions for the scale of the project and the timeline I had remaining. A surprise reply from a representative of bell hooks came via email sharing that she was permitting us to use her words but not her photo. There was no question that the poster should still be made of bell hooks despite not getting permission to use the photo. A decision was made to take the quote from her and enlarge it in place of a photo. This was followed by connecting with Jonathan Silin at a conference/workshop on social justice, education, and sexuality where he saw me present about the Hall of Justice project. He was a faculty discussant at the conference and he is

the partner of deceased photographer Robert Giard who had photographed Sylvia Rivera. I had just reached out to a LGBT History Instagram account that had posted the photo by Robert Giard earlier that week so it felt serendipitous to connect with him, he arranged for permission to use the photo in the series. This brought the series to include eleven subjects which was one less than what the youth advisory committee had selected but one more than the limit of what I had initially intended to do. It seemed like a logical point to cease any further effort to acquire photos and permissions as we had reached a dynamic and diverse representation of 2SLGBTQ activism.

In analyzing the make-up of Hall of Justice, the series honours eight people of colour. As a white researcher, I'm pleased this project doesn't center whiteness in sharing of Queer history. There are five women, five men, and a gender queer person which provided a nice symmetry. Six of the people are Trans identified and five are cisgender, this is also a welcome factor as gays and lesbians have historically been critiqued since winning the rights of gay marriage that they've left the "T" behind. The age range is middle-aged to older, the group is predominantly still alive today, with three recognized who have passed away (David Wojnarowicz, Simon Nkoli, and Sylvia Rivera). The poster series celebrates the beautiful diversity in our communities and informs viewers of the ways in which people organized to address barriers.

## DISTRIBUTION

*Hall of Justice* addresses a need for 2SLGBTQ youth to see their identities and their communities reflected on the walls of the spaces they frequent. Once they have been printed, the *Hall of Justice* posters will be distributed to community spaces in the youth sector and beyond to provide education and awareness about what 2SLGBTQ communities have achieved. The youth advisory committee will help to create a list of places the posters will be distributed and consider the ways in which we share this project and who do we hope receives the posters. Priority will be given to shelters, community spaces with large youth populations, and high schools outside of downtown Toronto where less 2SLGBTQ resources are available. Sharing the posters around the city celebrates both the work of the youth and their growing connectedness with the history of the 2SLGBTQ community. The education and awareness-building will be for *both* 2SLGBTQ youth and their peers. 2SLGBTQ youth who aren't (yet) connected to community have the potential to learn about HEAT and/or SOY through the posters. Beyond what is made available in initial print runs, these posters will be made available online for download.

Lastly, working with the Youth Advisory Committee, we will evaluate the process and product and gather responses from recipients. This process has great potential for a ripple effect where current generations build on foundational work of Queer and Trans liberation movements. When I think of what we can learn from the stories and experiences of the activists we chose to celebrate, it is the

ways in which they modelled courage and bravery and a strong sense of identity in the face of oppression. These people are persistent in their efforts of the betterment of 2SLGBTQ peoples, and particularly those who are most marginalized and oppressed. We can understand the ways their artwork, writing, and activism, although seemingly small actions at the time of occurrence were monumental in initiating a shift that helped people see a new way of living and dreaming. These are the most fruitful lessons, when Michael Chimba said “I have so many new heroes now” it was for me the essence of the project. I think the posters serve as a reminder that we are not the first to be faced with brutal situations of institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression. We can identify the ways in which our identity struggles are interconnected. Youth gain perspective of how dire the circumstances currently are and that our collective anger is entitled and valid. Our collective actions are in response to years of injustice and harm from state power and we draw on the knowledge, love, and energy that these activists used to build solidarity and community in the face of adversity.

## REVISITING RESEARCH

“Contrary to what we may have been taught to think, unnecessary and unchosen suffering wounds us but need not scar us for life. It does mark us. What we allow the mark of our suffering to become is in our own hands.” (p. 137) This profound quote by bell hooks (2001) is significant to this project because Hall of Justice

bridged the historical suffering experienced by the activists we celebrated with the contemporary suffering experienced by HEAT members. This demonstrates what the youth community has done with the suffering in “our own hands”.

The ways in which the 2SLGBTQ youth community suffers is not the focus. Instead the project acknowledges the systemic issues our communities face and the focus is on the ways in which our communities have thrived and overcome significant barriers. This demonstrates a desire based framework in line with the work of Eve Tuck (2009). As she so eloquently articulates:

Desire based frameworks defy the lure to serve as “advertisements for power” by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope. Such an axiology is intent on depathologizing the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered. This is to say that even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that – so much more than this incomplete story is an act of aggression. (p. 416)

Hall of Justice strived for democratizing the research process by engaging in the collaborative process of “PAR Deep” (Fine, 2000.) To accomplish this, HEAT members participated in “all aspects of design, method, analysis, and product development” (Billies. 2010. p. 355). Author Michelle Billies breaks down the components that inform the process of conscientization and the role it has in PAR. She writes

“Developed out of in-depth interview with multicultural educators they found that ongoing experiences of exposure to diversity, critical incidents, aha moments, self-reflection, social justice action, and relationships with identity communities other than their own all contribute to the meaning-making that manifest as critical consciousness.” (p. 363)

The participation of the youth advisory committee not only gave the project integrity but also a richness that does not generally come from an individual researcher perspective. Arts-based methods are interwoven into the HEAT training program and yet there have rarely been opportunities within HEAT to collaborate on larger art projects over an extended period of time. According to Melanie Kramer (2006), in their essay on activism through interventionist art: “Art and creativity have a place in effecting change, in creating dynamic places and in shaping the exchange of knowledge, stories and information.” (p. 121) I think that the products that result from this process will be a source of pride and empowerment for those who were involved. The posters will not only impact the youth participants but also the youth audiences in the places they are distributed to and displayed. Hall of Justice is influenced by brilliant community based research projects of Sarah Flicker (2014) who wrote “The art products produced by youth participants, then, were effective tools for promoting dialogue and to transmitting messages about difficult subjects...” (p. 9 Flicker).

I would argue that the entire process with the youth advisory committee was an act of collective activism. Deb Barndt’s (2006) idea that “In challenging narrow definitions of art and activism, we reframe art as activism. Whether the modes are verbal or non-verbal, artmaking that ignites people’s creativity, recovers repressed histories, build community and strengthens social movements is in itself a holistic form of action.” (p.18). In participating in this process together I witnessed the strengthening of relationships, the sharing of experiences, and the

spark of creativity. This type of activism may be a stark contrast to the activism that involves demonstrating in the streets. Yet both are empowering, have their place and work towards positive social change and the liberation of oppressed people.

When viewing the posters and the priorities that they illuminate, it is clear this series is not about reproducing existing power structures. Building on the ideas of authors like Tim McCaskell (2016), Hall of Justice centers the most marginalized within 2SLGBTQ communities and celebrates the ways in which their efforts impacted the broader society.

“In reaction to conservatism and respectability, queer has championed dissent. Queer has an elective class basis. It includes marginalized young people, trans people who refuse to stealthily confirm to gender norms, young intellectuals with few prospects of achieving their class aspirations in the neo-liberal university, the unrespectable and often racialized poor, old radicals consigned to the margins.” (p. 468)

Hall of Justice recognizes the ways in which many individuals continue to face oppression even though government policies have evolved around 2SLGBTQ issues yet from an intersectional perspective the risk of harm is magnified as Beth Ritchie addresses in her writing (2005).

“Those within the LGBT movement who rely on a mainstream civil rights analysis of the problem consider access to mainstream social institutions to be possible and desirable, especially for those who can prove themselves deserving because of their otherwise privileged status. The LGBT people whose primary concerns fall outside the narrow confines of that approach, those whose race, class, appearance, or lack of interest in marriage or other institutional privilege are seen as threats to the larger

civil rights-oriented project of LGBT liberation. Indeed, there is virtually no space in the public discourse that emerges from this analysis for consideration of queer youth who are juvenile delinquents or people who are arrested for non-normative sexual identity or practices. (p. 73)”

Hall of Justice is rooted in Queer Theory and an anti-oppressive framework that understands that the liberation of those who experience the most oppression inevitably means the liberation of all people. Hall of Justice is a major project that bridged my areas of concentration within the Environmental Studies Master’s program at York University. The 2SLGBTQ Activist Poster Series bridged Arts-based Pedagogy of Social Justice, Anti-Oppression Theory, and 2SLGBTQ Histories of Creative Resistance. Through consultation with HEAT, the collaboration worked to illuminate the people, methods, and practices of 2SLGBTQ activism. In line with the belief that tools for social change are best when shared, the posters provide information and inspiration to explore how to realize change. Through the process of researching and discussing the work of established 2SLGBTQ activists, the Youth Advisory Committee developed a nuanced understanding about the barriers, setbacks, and victories within their communities and the tactics and methods that were employed to challenge injustice. Where ever displayed the posters are certain to inspire and generate dialogue in public spaces and help 2SLGBTQ youth understand their connection to elders, to history, and to see in themselves the potential to impact change.

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