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Co-producing Digital Archives with 2LGBTQ+ Atlantic Canadian Youth amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: We explore the co-production of a digital archive with 50 2SLGBTQ+ youth across Atlantic Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to catalyze broader public participation in understanding 2SLGBTQ+ youth-led activism in this place and time through art production.

Design/methodology/approach: Through a mail-based participatory visual research project, and an examination of collage, zines, and DIY facemasks, we highlight how the production, sharing, and archiving of youth-produced art adds to methodological discussions of exhibiting and digital archiving with 2SLGBTQ+ youth as a form of activist intervention.

Findings: In reflexively examining the co-curation of our art through social media and project website, we argue that co-producing digital archives is an important part of knowledge mobilization. Also, we consider how the work has been interacted with by a broader public, so far in an exclusively celebratory manner, and note the benefits and challenges of this type of engagement to the youth and to our understandings of 2SLGBTQ+ youth archives.

Originality: We suggest that these modes of engaging in participatory visual research at a distance offers original contributions in relation to how participation can be understood in a digital and mail-based project. We see participant-control of how to share our works within our digital archives as a contribution to our understanding of people's capacity to negotiate and take ownership of these spaces. These strategies are participant-centred and suggest ways that

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archiving can be made more accessible especially when working with communities who are socially marginalized or otherwise excluded from the archival process.

Keywords: Archives; Collage; Co-production; DIY; Facemasks; 2SLGBTQ+; Queer; Trans; Youth; Zines

Introduction

What can participatory visual research—the co-production of visual research materials and an archive of these products—look like during a pandemic? Pride/Swell is an art and activism project that engages 50 youth who are 2SLGBTQ+[i] from across Atlantic Canada: Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been exploring the creation of new communities and connections across spaces through different artistic media (i.e., collage, zines, facemasks, dioramas, dolls) and their exhibition through digital archiving practices. Pride/Swell is grounded in ethical concerns about representation and voice in participatory visual research methodologies (PVM). We seek to employ participant-produced art to catalyze broader public participation in complexifying our understanding of 2SLGBTQ+ youth-led activism (Gubrium and Harper 2013; Mitchell 2011)[ii].

Participatory visual researchers have only begun to probe the notion of what it means to bring a participatory ethos—including the perspectives of participants who generated the data and the audiences who interact with the texts (Rose 2014)—to exhibiting and archiving (exceptions include: Allard and Ferris 2015; de Lange and Mitchell 2012; Rydz 2010). The role of archiving in a participatory fashion is also grossly understudied (Burkholder 2016; Lorenz and Kolb 2009; Vindrola-Padros *et al*. 2016). In this article we examine how Pride/Swell has supported the consumption of participants' art through social media[iii] and a project website.

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Additionally, we consider how broader publics interact with the work. We argue that co-producing digital archives is an important part of knowledge mobilization.

Positioning Ourselves in Relation to the Study

In this article, Casey, Katie, April, and Amelia, write together as the members of the Pride/Swell research team. Our project builds from earlier collaborations that Casey and Amelia had fostered with 2SLGBTQ+ youth on Wolastoqiyik Territory (Fredericton, New Brunswick) through a series of monthly arts-based workshops surrounding issues of belonging and identity within and beyond schools (Burkholder and Thorpe 2019; Burkholder *et al.* 2021; Thorpe 2020). Casey is a cisgender, White[iv], bisexual Associate Professor whose research program centres on exploring issues of gender, sexuality, belonging, and activism through participatory visual approaches, especially using cellphilms, zines, and stencil production. Amelia is a White, queer, cisgender graduate student whose research focuses on education, advocacy, and community-building within sexual and gender minority communities. Katie is also a White, cisgender, female academic whose sexual identity is fluid and generally undefined. Her research focuses on the integration of participatory visual methods in various contexts internationally predominantly with the intention of developing community-specific sexual and reproductive health strategies. April is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Art Education at NSCAD University. She is White, straight, and of settler background. Her community-based art education research looks at issues of rurality and spatial justice, young people's visual culture, ethical practice, and creative approaches to research participation and policy change. While we ground our thinking in practices of participation and co-production, a tension in the production of this article is that only the research team was engaged in its writing. We acknowledge the participants' contributions to the project as a whole, and to this manuscript in the form of advisory feedback at a monthly

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Zoom meeting. We continue to work towards solidarity with the Pride/Swell participants as we reflect on the social roles of artistic production, processes of belonging and advocacy, and innovative approaches to participation.

The Pride/Swell Study during COVID-19

Our project contributes to methodological discussions of exhibiting and digital archiving PVM with 2SLGBTQ+ youth as a form of activist intervention (Altenberg *et al*., 2018). In 2019, when we sought funding for Pride/Swell, we envisioned a very different project than the one we ended up conducting in 2020 after the onset of COVID-19 pandemic. Originally (pre-COVID-19), we were going to use project funds to convene participants in person at the University of New Brunswick for a 2SLGBTQ+ youth-focused art making and archiving event. Participants were to create art and plan a travelling archive of their work. Our intention in planning the project like this was two-fold: (1) to build a sense of community across the diversity of youth who identify within 2SLGBTQ+ communities in Atlantic Canada; (2) to explicitly center a co-produced archive from the very beginning of the art-making process.

When the pandemic became a reality in Canada, we reconsidered our in-person methods. We became excited by the opportunities that a physically distanced approach might offer our project. Moving our project online allowed us to grow our intended 25 participants to 55 participants. We decided to mail monthly art packages to each participant. Each package explored a different artistic medium (e.g., zines, collage, masks, dioramas, dolls) and dimension of the research question (e.g., intersectional identities, community, queer futures). Packages contained art supplies, and directions on how to engage with the artistic medium. The participants and research team met monthly over Zoom to discuss their artistic process, visions for archiving and disseminating the art, and to hear from invited guest speakers—most

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2SLGBTQ+ artists based in Atlantic Canada—about their work. Although the research team has experience facilitating participatory visual research projects in different contexts, this was our first time facilitating research at a distance through mail.

Co-production and Participatory Visual Research

Co-production is identified as a collaborative effort to identify and shift systems of power and taken for granted research practices. In this framing, participants are positioned as co-researchers at various stages of research—the creation of research questions, nuancing the methods, data analysis, and knowledge mobilization. These ideas are taken up also by community-based and participatory visual scholars that view research as intervention into social practice (Flicker *et al.* 2018, Mitchell *et al.* 2017). However, we draw mainly on the literature on co-production (e.g., Bell and Pahl 2017) to inform our understanding of participant engagement—with art, archives, and in response to social conditions—in the project. Co-production theory views participants as knowledge producers who can engage in deep inquiry from their places of knowing. As Bell and Pahl, suggest, within research practice:

> This 'turn' to co-production…may be undertaken through the formation of a 'community of practice' (Hart et al. 2013) or a space of 'dialogic co-inquiry' (Banks et al. 2014), in which measures are introduced to mitigate the (often invisible) hierarchies between academic and non-academic partners. (Bell and Pahl 2017, p. 106).

Working with participants to co-produce knowledge about the world that draws from their experiences and engages them in visual production has been lauded as powerful, and as a way to impact discourse and practice. Brännström, Nyhlén and Gådin (2020) used photovoice with girls to explore gender-based violence and found the method to be an effective tool that "largely engaged people, at the local, community, and political level" (Brännström *et al*. 2020, p. 10).

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Inviting young people to explore participatory approaches to research dissemination encourages a broader uptake in research as it engages different audiences (from participants to policy makers) which may result in local change (Evans 2016).

However, the process of participatory visual co-production also raises unique challenges for community-research dynamics. Reflecting on a project with Indigenous girls that led to a multi-media text they called *Girlfesto*, Marnina Gonick and her colleagues identified opportunities and challenges to what they called "feminist partnering" in intergenerational work between feminist adult researchers and girl researchers. They argue taking a collaborative approach in an intergenerational project requires finding the right balance between adult and girl-led initiatives (Edell, *et al*. 2016; Gonick, *et al.* 2020). Engaging in research *with* participants cannot eliminate tensions and power dynamics related to co-producing and co-disseminating research (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Participatory visual co-production scholars should query the notions and practices of 'empowerment'. Ersoy explains:

> 'empowerment' of communities, as a process through which unpaid 'active citizen-subjects' take responsibility for social provision, has been analysed as an important technology of neoliberal governmentality that fails to address the material inequalities that foreground disempowerment (hall and Reed 1998; Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Marinetto 2003; Larner and Butler, 2005). (Ersoy 2017, p. 4)

We kept these tensions in mind as we set out to develop our own intergenerational and co-produced research project with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in the Pride/Swell project. In discussing the co-production of the archive, we highlight tensions in relation to the processes of sharing and audiencing the artworks. Although we are familiar with the debates and practices of these

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methods in face-to-face research workshops and projects, we sought to understand how these methods of co-production might be nuanced in digital and distance-based research practices.

Queer Focused Archiving

In co-producing the Pride/Swell archives, we draw on participatory archive theory and the scholarship and activism of queer-focused archives. Participatory and community archives look different based on the community, but generally encompass, "community-led/centric/based archives, DIY (do-it-yourself), grassroots, oppositional, participatory, or independent archives, and archives from-the-bottom-up" (Gilliland and McKemmish 2014, p. 3). Participatory approaches to archives conceptualize users as active participants who co-create and co-curate meaning in a kind of democratization of archival spaces (Evaleigh 2017). For example, curators of participatory archives often contribute to the archives from their own collections (Roeschley and Kim 2019). Community archives—including queer archives—have capitalized on the availability of digital spaces in order to seek ephemera, to co-curate, and to share "a multiplicity of different perspectives, meanings, and contexts around the archival record, including traditionally excluded voices and minority communities (Flinn 2010; Yakel 2011)" (Evaleigh 2017, p. 300). Ann Vetkovich's (2003) cultural criticism, *An Archive of Feelings*, highlights the relevancy and potency of archiving everyday experiences—including trauma—within queer organizing, art making, and activism. Through the visual documentation provided by image-based social media service Instagram, queer punk tattoos have become archives within archives, extending beyond the lifespan of the adorned individual (Rosenberg and Sharp 2018). Instagram has also provided a platform for which queer punx can locate and connect with each other, to buy, sell and trade tattoo practices among in-the-flesh spaces which are safer for queer people.

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T.L. Cowan and Jasmine Rault (2018) describe the process of digital reproduction or the impulse to "digitize, network, and online previously not-online materials" (p. 121) as offering researchers of queer spaces, experiences, and content an opportunity to destabilize conventional exploitative research systems and decolonize research practices and relationships. However, these authors also ask researchers to critically examine to what extent we may remain "complicit in the reproduction of extractive, possessive, individualist capitalist modern colonial projects" (p. 123). These contributions have deep value to 2SLGBTQ+ communities whose histories and experiences are (re)defined and whose belonging is (re)inscribed through archiving (Roeschley and Kim 2019).

Queer archives are necessary because institutional archives—like those of museums and government—so often exclude or erase the experiences, organizing histories, and ephemera of 2SLGBTQ+ people and communities (Gilliland and McKemmish 2014). Explicitly queer archives have been described as "counter public spaces" where "the articulation of complex emotions—from anger to resentment to pain and an acute sense of loss, as well as delight in desire and the pleasures of naming desire and claiming community—becomes central to queer rhetorical work" (Alexander and Rhodes 2020, p. 3). syrus marcus ware (2017) articulates a need for a radical queering of archiving practices—which he calls 'counter archiving'—in an effort to resist homonationalism and the overreliance on White archives and artifacts in existing queer archives. Springgay, Truman, and MacLean (2020) describe the notion of anarchiving—a mode of archiving that highlights ways of orienting action in the present and future. Many queer archives have been established in an effort to document lived experience and lived history, thus providing glimpses of what it meant to be 2SLGBTQ+ at different moments and through time. It has been suggested that queer archives:

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> provide us powerful opportunities to think critically about systems of oppression and the interlocking mechanisms of the "personal" and the "political. (Alexander and Rhodes 2020, p. 3).

Explicitly centering participants in co-creating a queer archive is the main impetus for the Pride/Swell project. We situate the work within Atlantic Canada's queer archival history, such as the Queer Heritage Initiative of New Brunswick, the Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors Archive [also called the Rainbow Seniors Archive], the Nova Scotia LGBT Archives, Prince Edward Island's The Rainbow Hub, and the 2019 exhibition "Archives in Waves" in St. John's, Newfoundland's Eastern Edge Gallery. Daze Jefferies wrote in the introduction to the "Archives in Waves" exhibition, "What else can we remember together?...engaging with queer and trans archives in waves of resilience and social change might hold us together through our past-present-future worlds" (2019, para. 2). Pride/Swell is inspired by these Atlantic archives' assertions of queer narratives and the project hopes to contribute to their ongoing work of recognized the established history of Atlantic Canadian queer communities and activism.

Engaging Creative Methods with Youth

We engage with art making as a mode of knowledge production with participants. Working with the visual offers us the opportunity to understand, to co-analyze, and co-disseminate alongside participants. Participatory visual research methodologies encourage participants to create visual responses to prompts. Creative outputs can then be used as knowledge representation and dissemination. The significance of the Pride/Swell archive is how it allows for participants to see themselves and their art reflected in a community representation, which might act as a jumping off point to further opportunities for engagement and social change. These opportunities come

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through personal and public interactions with the archive. The evanescent and always emerging aspects of the Pride/Swell archive are implicitly understood to be both a part and a future of the project's research creation.

The Pride/Swell Archive

In what follows, we describe how we co-produced Pride/Swell, starting with participant recruitment. We highlight three artistic mediums that were explored early on (August to October, 2020) in the Pride/Swell project: collage, zine, and facemask-selfies so as to explore the archive through what Rachel Miller (2019) explains as a kind of ecosystem, rather than taking the individual practices on their own.

Co-producing Pride/Swell

When we originally sought participants for Pride/Swell, we wanted to work with 10 young people (aged 15-25) from Fredericton, New Brunswick—where the in-person workshops would be held—and 5 from each of the other three Atlantic Canadian provinces (25 in total). Casey created a poster (Figure 1), and we shared it across our personal and professional social networks.

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Figure 1: Call for Participants

Participants who met the research inclusion requirements were accepted into the project on a first-come, first-served basis. We quickly realized that interest in the project exceeded our expectations. When the pandemic prompted the possibility to expand the number of participants, we contacted the 25 participants using an anonymous survey to ask them how they wanted to proceed: "Should we grow the Pride/Swell project to 50 people, which means that we would have to cancel the proposed in-person component of the project (meeting in Fredericton in August 2021)?" Resoundingly, 82% of participants responded that they "would prefer to grow the project, allowing more people to receive the art packages in the mail, and having a larger group for digital networking." Some participants included further anonymous reasoning for their decision. One participant explained, "I think that extending the reach of the project is really important and [I] am more than happy to give up the in-person component to create more space."

Another person responded, “I think as many people as possible should have this opportunity to express themselves with art. I feel including more people would add more flavour and perspective to the project overall.” Of the participants who did not want to grow the project, one shared, “In person is a good opportunity for people to connect,” while another participant shared that they preferred the in-person meeting, “I have chosen this option as I am excited to meet others in person and share our common love of art!” and another participant shared, “This is just my preference and i think you should do what you think is right, ultimately.” With the majority of the first 25 youth voting to expand the project, we contacted an additional 30 youth who had expressed interest in the study and invited them to participate. In total, 55 youth signed the institutionally approved consent forms to participate in the study, though 5 have since withdrawn from the project (one in September 2020, one in November 2020, one in December 2020, one in January 2021, and one in February 2021). While the group is predominantly White, participants identify dynamically in regards to gender, sexuality, age, class, (dis)ability and other socio-demographic identifiers.

There were unique challenges associated with using a mail-based approach to distributing the Pride/Swell art-making materials to some participants that highlight the ways in which participants’ homes may not be affirming spaces at this time. One participant asked that we do not share the name of the project (Pride/Swell) on the front of their envelope as they did not want their family to know about their participation in the project. Casey asked if she could provide her home address on the envelope, and the participant stated that it would be a good work around for them. Another participant, whose parent originally reached out to us to enroll their child in Pride/Swell, asked that we send the package to their home in their deadname because their parent was struggling to accept their identity. We use their name in our email correspondence and Zoom

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meetings, but we write their deadname on their art packages per their wishes. Thus, the strategy of using the mail to support co-production encounters and negotiates the larger social and familial complexities of being young and 2SLGBTQ+ in Atlantic Canada.

Co-producing Collage

The first art package we sent arrived at most participants' home in early July 2020 during the early months of the pandemic. The large manila envelopes contained supplies (old family photographs, comic books from the 1950s-70s, and various maps curated by Fredericton's Chase Benjamin Antiques, alongside other modern-day crafting supplies such as glue, scissors, sparkly card stock, buttons, and googly eyes). The envelope also included directions for collage and asked participants to explore the topic of "Finding Community Amidst COVID-19." Collage is a visual research method where participants cut, remix, paste, and design images using materials like fabric, paper, magazines, and buttons. Collage lends itself to experimentation, and has been used as reflexive practice, such as in the work of Vaughan (2005) who argues that her "collage practice also links me to the questioning, experimental work current in social science and humanities research" (Vaughan 2005, p. 44). Yuen notes that the interpretive and messy processes involved in collage, "can be associated with resisting oppression and moving beyond the margins" (2016, p. 344). While reflexively rigorous, the approachable nature of the method provided participants with archival materials. Participants were also encouraged to incorporate their own materials to realize their artistic vision.

We explained collage method using visuals and text. Casey created a short instructional document (Figure 2). Examples from collage pieces that were produced in Casey and Amelia's previous zine making workshop with 2SLGBTQ+ youth in February 2019 (Burkholder, *et al.*

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2021) provided visual prompting and inspiration. Casey's initial draft of the instructional document was shared with the team for feedback and minor revisions were provided to further explicate the process.

Figure 2: Collage Instructions

Participants were invited to create and then take photographs of their collages to share with the research team, and with their consent, the rest of the project participants and the public. They were also encouraged to write a short artist statement about their piece that that could be shared in our digital archives, which at the time included a Pride/Swell Facebook page and a dedicated project website. Social media is inherently archival, but in creating a structure of care for people and content we are attempting to facilitate a more ethical archive. Participants' collages were dynamic and thoughtful. For example, Dominica's piece (Figure 3) made imaginative use of not only the intended collage materials but also the instructional page, to

create the image of a mother and child embracing. She wrote the following text to explain the significance of her image in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic:

> My mother and I only had each other in quarantine, but she was a frontline worker. We tried to avoid each other in her small bachelor apartment, staying on opposite sides of the same one room unit in an attempt to keep each other safe. It didn't work. When Public Health called to say that we had tested positive for COVID-19, all we asked was if we could finally hug each other again.

Figure 3: Dominica's Collage

In August, participants were invited to our first Zoom-based participatory analysis of the collages. Through discussion with the 13 participants who attended, we learned that participants were heartened by the positive responses to their works shared on our website, and on Facebook. The group also suggested expanding the digital archives to include Instagram and Twitter. As one participant said, "I'd love everyone to have their own spotlight—Instagram [would be great] because everyone could get their own moment." In response, we created an Instagram account that grew to 107 followers, and Twitter with 37 followers and a Facebook page with 34 followers (engagement grew as participants shared the pieces across their networks). Casey also shared all of the projects on her personal and professional Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook pages. People liked, commented, and shared the collages across digital networks. Each day for over a month, a participant's collage and explanatory text were posted individually on social media.

We also sent out a survey to gauge participants' experiences with the collage process and provide analysis of the collage collection. We received 5 responses to the survey. We learnt that some participants were creating and audiencing their pieces in person. One participant shared, "I sat down and did my collage with two of my friends in the study. We got to see each other's collages from start to finish. I really appreciated their reactions and feedback about what they enjoyed." Dominica's collage was shared 6 times on Facebook, and received 31 likes. On Instagram, it received 20 likes. On Twitter, the piece received 9 likes and 4 retweets. In our collage analysis meeting, one participant responded. "I was really struck by [the collage] Dominica made of the two people embracing. It was really cool…not just using the images, and like putting them on, but creating new images out of that, and it turned out quite beautifully." However, Dominica's survey response indicated that she had not followed the audience reaction

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to her piece as it was shared in our digital archival spaces. She "didn't see any reactions. For me personally, I reflected on when my mother and I were diagnosed with the virus. It brought back those feelings of hopelessness that I felt when we got the call from Public Health and the isolation I felt from the rest of the world. I didn't even want to look at my online community because we had got sick when people were still making quarantine memes and I couldn't look at them anymore. I really only had my mother, and it brought back those feelings of connection when it feels like it's only you and them against the world." Therefore, while the participants encourage their work to be shared and archived online, their enthusiasm for digital archive seemed to stand alongside a deep appreciation for in-person connections of creating and sharing their work – connections that were significantly disrupted as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Co-producing Zines

We chose zines as the artistic medium for the second art package. Zines are (usually) short self-published DIY print productions. Fife (2019) argues that "zines sit awkwardly between public documents (such as pamphlets or newsletters) and private documents (such as letters or diaries)" (p. 239). Zine making has been described as a "counter-hegemonic practice" (Reynolds 2020, p. 93) as producers create and share narratives in a digestible mode of printmaking. Queer zine production "attempt[s] to transcend, augment, and resist mass-mediated expectations of normative sexuality and gender identity" (Reynolds 2020, p. 93, see also Chidgey 2014). On the question of how we might understand zine-making as an anti-institutional practice within community archives—the creation of a DIY institutional space—Fife (2019) argues that "zine communities and other marginalized groups resist institutional power through the establishment of their own community-based archives" (p. 228). The Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP)—for

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example—is an online digital archive that hosts over 2000 queer zines (Latham 2019). As a community archiving project, QZAP "initiate[ed] the collection, and maintain[s]control, [and as such] the community is actively involved in the discourse shaping the identity of that community and creating the potential of presence for that community beyond the mainstreamed culture" (Latham 2019, p. 1).

In August 2020, Casey sent participants a new manila envelope with zine-making instructions (Figure 4) and materials (scissors, glue, markers, crayons, pencil crayons, glitter, cardstock, and buttons). The research team suggested the zines could be made in response to the prompt: "I am _____ & _____ & _____." Through this prompt, we sought to understand the intersectional nature of participants' identities (Crenshaw 1991). All participants identified as 2SLGBTQ+, and we were interested in exploring the nuances of our identities by creating spaces for community-building across Indigeneity, race, gender identity, sexuality, class, and ability. The practice also gave us—as the research team—the opportunity to share our own experiences and identities with participants.

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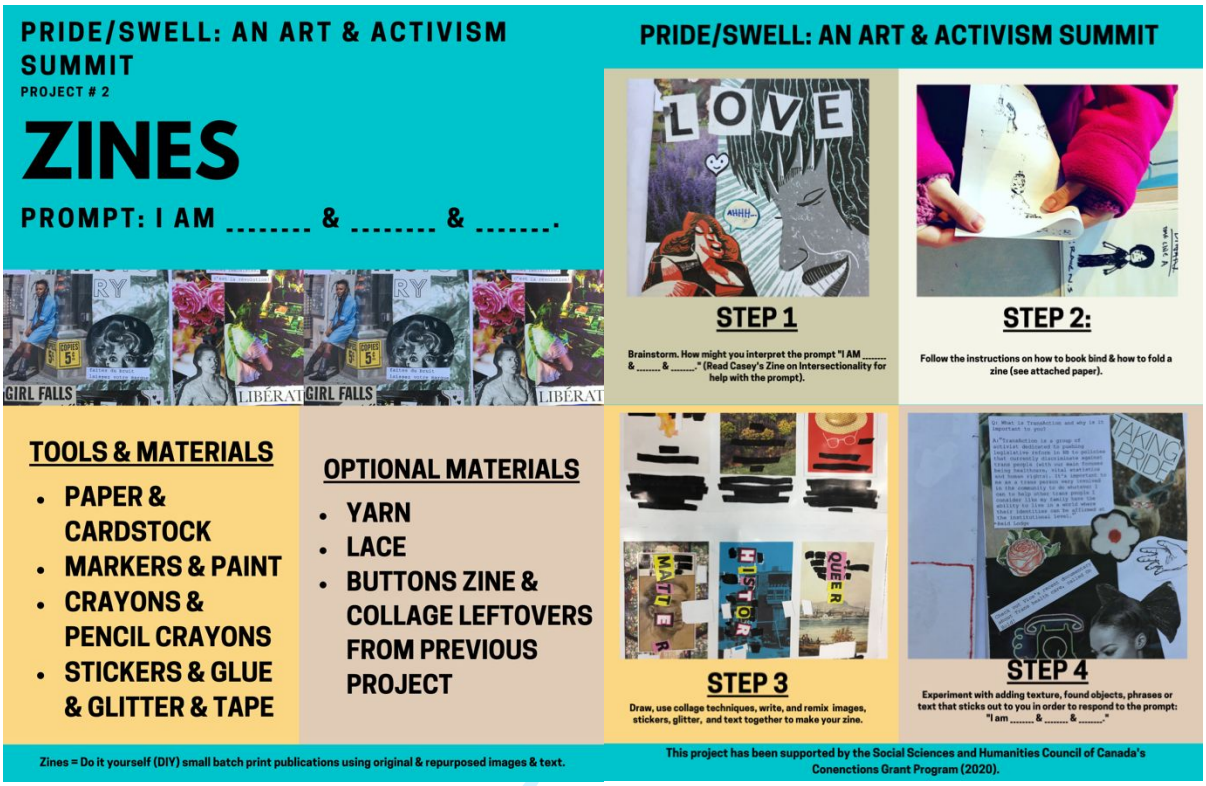

Figure 4: DIY Zines Instructions

Casey created her own zine that was included in each package as an example. Her personal interpretation of the prompt depicted in her zine was offered as a means of self-disclosure and relationship building with participants. Casey's zine described her sexuality, and how she has not shared this component of her identity with her family. To share her zine on the various digital archives, she created a short cellphilm (cellphone + film production + intention, see MacEntee, *et al.* 2016; 2019) that showed her flipping through the pages of her zine. She cut two versions of the cellphilm. One version, the complete zine, was shared on the project's Twitter and Instagram feeds, and on our project website. These were spaces where Casey interacted with her professional networks, but were not likely to be visited by her extended family (parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). Facebook, however, a space where Casey's professional and personal

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networks interact and blend, Casey cut out a few seconds of film—the part where she shared her own response to the prompt (Figure 5), "I am _____ & _____ & _____."

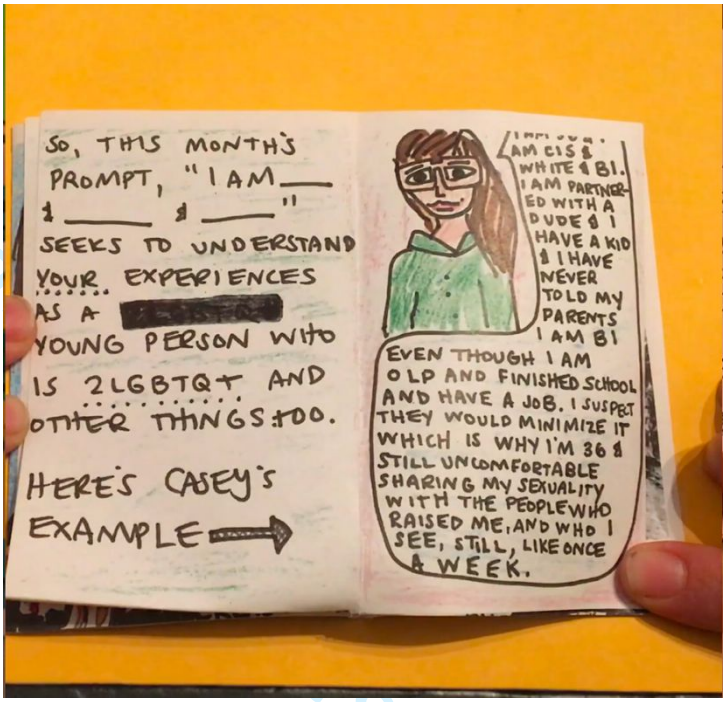

Figure 5. The Missing Page from Casey's Zine

Some Pride/Swell participants also chose to curate how much of their zine to share on the digital archives. Like Casey, one participant removed a page of their publicly shared zine because they worried it would be viewed critically by their parent. Other participants and research team members hesitated in creating and sharing a zine because they felt uncomfortable ascribing labels to their identity. These hesitations and exclusions demonstrate how co-produced archives can be navigated spaces where the public and personal intersected. We see this participant-control of how to share our works within our digital archives as a contribution to our understanding of people's capacity to negotiate and take ownership of art produced in research contexts. These strategies are participant-centred and suggest ways that archiving can be made

more accessible especially when working with communities who are socially marginalized or otherwise excluded from the archival process.

Co-producing Masks

Our third art package explored the production of facemasks. Packages contained a small pair of sewing scissors, fabric pen, 3 squares of 5 by 5 patterned fabric, embroidery thread, pins and an embroidery needle. Casey created a demonstrative cellphilm and directions (Figure 6) for hand sewing a facemask with an embroidered message on the front. The research team developed prompt for this production: "Staying safe but never silent." Our directions in a letter to participants highlighted the ways that "we are wearing masks to keep our friends/neighbours/community members safe during Covid-19. We are also thinking about how powerful masks can be, especially as they have been used in protest. We like the idea of sharing something that matters to you on a mask. It can be a design, a phrase, anything." The mask-making technique was inspired by feminist theorist-activists. In her dissertation on queer and trans feminist maker cultures, Melissa Rogers argues that "[queer and trans] feminist craft praxis functions as a soft circuit: a technological pathway or schematic for feeling our way toward newly habitable worlds and ways of being" (2017, p. 2). Exploring sewing, DIY fashion, and punk subcultures in the 1990s, Sklar and Donahue (2018) suggest that "for this [punk] subcultural community, the process to produce and consume was an integral part of meaning being imbued in the products" (Sklar and Donahue 2018, p. 155). In her dissertation on sewing and retro visual cultures, Charity Armstead wrote, "similar to prosumerism is the idea of craft consumption, defined as the activity of designing and making the products that one consumes (Campbell 2005).Whereas the concept of prosumerism applies to any activity done by an

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individual for himself/herself, including self-checkout at the grocery (Ritzer 2015) or home pregnancy tests (Toffler 1980, p. 265), craft consumption refers specifically to designing and making products for one's own use" (Armstead 2018, p. 49). The act of sewing—and sharing sewing with others—acts as a mode of forming communities (Gordon 2009).

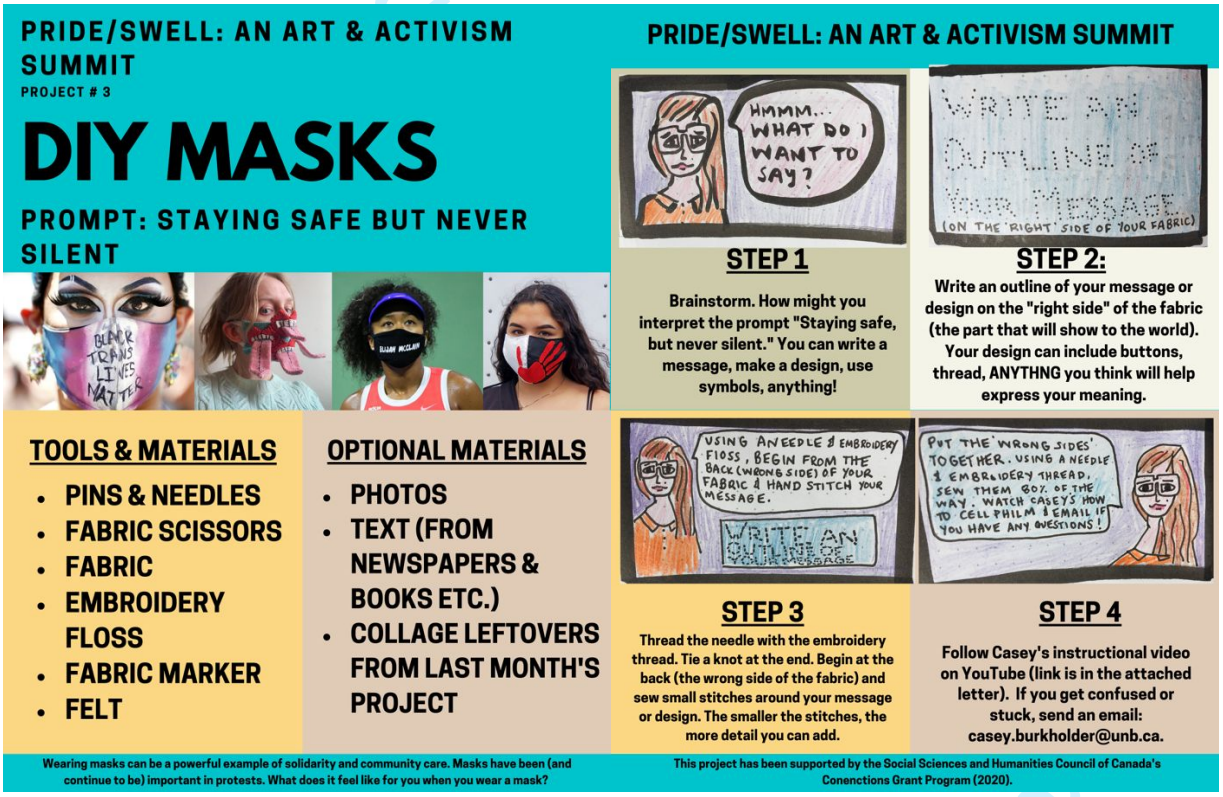

Figure 6: DIY Facemasks Instructions

Participants shared still photographs as well as short videos of their facemasks. Some participants included their faces in their still and video selfies, while others did not (e.g. Bliss' example, Figure 7).

Figure 7: Still from Bliss' Facemask and Selfie Video

When we audienced Bliss' facemask and selfie video, they wanted to share it broadly across all of our digital archives with the following text, "Bliss' gorgeous facemask responds to the prompt, "Staying Safe, But Never Silent." Bliss writes: "I've learned that to sustain an activist lifestyle, I have to be calm and self-assured. I present myself as confident, even if I'm uncertain. My chain mask represents the battle we have trying to break apart the chains that bind our imploding society. We must break free of our old destructive patterns and create new revolutionary ideas. This mask represents my warrior mode. In the battlefield, that is so often bureaucratic, this is my armor."

Bliss' mask was shared 3 times and liked 6 times on Twitter. On Facebook, Bliss' mask was shared 3 times, and liked 8 times. On Instagram, it received 57 views, 17 likes, and a follower wrote, "The imagery of this truly made me go "whoa"! Absolutely incredible!"

Co-Producing the Archives

The first art practices (collage making and zine production) elicited the most enthusiastic responses from participants, perhaps because the project was new. The art practices that have involved sewing (e.g., mask and doll making) have not been taken up or shared to the same extent by participants. Initially participants share their artworks with Casey via email. In conversation with Casey over email participants explore the components of the artwork that they would like to make public and through which digital spaces. It is in these exchanges that participants have space to decide if they want to give their artworks a title, and if they want to add a sentence or two to contextualize the piece in relation to a given prompt. We note that, so far, the reception of the project in all of our online archival spaces—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the dedicated project website—has been celebratory. Still, we monitor and discuss strategies to engage and contribute with the archive in ways that feel safer and more accessible to our participants. Zoom gatherings have become key venues to for participants to explore aspects of the project that cause uncertainty or discomfort and ways of sharing work that honours their contributions while not sharing too much; however, these meetings also have sporadic attendance. Although our project has 50 participants, we usually host only 6-10 people in any one Zoom meet up (including the research team). As co-producers and as researchers we actively negotiate and demonstrate our ethical responsibility to create a safer space for participants to engage with the participatory archive within these Zoom meet ups.

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Opportunities and Tensions to Co-producing Archives

We see the Pride/Swell process of archive development to reflect what Stephanie Springgay, Anises Truman and Sara MacLean describe as "grounded in accountability and reciprocity…emerg[ing] from community-based and collaborative processes [and]…build[ing] on struggles from the past that continue to impact our lives in the present" (2020, p. 897). The co-production process of Pride/Swell negotiates the culture of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in Atlantic Canada, which is steeped in a history that has persecuted and shamed 2SLGBTQ+ communities since colonization. The negotiation of delivering art-making materials and archiving them on publicly accessible online spaces means that discussions about safety are paramount. Offering different opportunities for these discussions—one-on-one with a member of the research team over email or as a group over Zoom—we look at different options and each participant can decide what works best for them.

As a publicly accessible archive, Pride/Swell contributes to the development and strengthening of archival voice in the Atlantic provinces. Through our monthly prompts we find creative pathways to revisit themes of community, intersectionality and self-definition, and speaking out. The archive as a whole reflects this collective exploration of themes through its presentation of heterogeneous (including age, sexuality, gender, educational experience, rural/urban, ability/disability, etc.) 2SLGBTQ+ artists. COVID-19 challenged us to consider how working across distance could offer an opportunity for expanding this collective engagement in co-productive archive building. However, we also acknowledge that although we were able to invite additional participants, we did not think critically enough about our recruitment strategy at the time and relied mostly on our existing networks. In particular, we note limitations in our chosen

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strategy in regards to recruiting Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants. As a result, the particular perspectives of 2SLGBTQ+ youth living Atlantic Canada who are racialized are minimally represented within the project.

Furthermore, our use of on-line archives has both benefits and challenges. Social media sites like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook offer ready-made archives that we can adapt to house the Pride/Swell work. On one hand, because these platforms offer different ways of presenting content and often reach diverse audiences as a result, project participants can navigate their visibility and safety. Audience engagement with the project can also be maximized through tracking and documenting. On the other hand, these are commercialized digital spaces and the issue of ownership in the co-production process is potentially comprised. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are all owned by the same multi-national company. When we agree to the terms and conditions of these sites, we are giving access to the Pride/Swell archive. The commercialization of sexual and gender diversity may offer increased public visibility, which may be viewed as inroad for social transformation, is indicative of the ongoing commodification of queer existence, which "provides placebo rights to queer consumers who are hailed by capitalism but not by [national] legislation" (Puar 2007, p. 62). The rise of narrow, mainstream representations of queerness and the commercialization of 2SLGBTQ+ narratives serve to reify homonormativity and discourses of social progress and consumerism, thus diminishing the "queer political goals of destabilizing identity" and the transformational, subversive potential of queer narratives and experiences (Ng 2013, p. 277). It is important to recognize the tensions of engaging in a project that is deliberately political, sometimes anti-capitalist, and yet, using these platforms to share the knowledge, while corporations profit from the art pieces that we choose to share on these platforms.

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Moving Forward

Our project is ongoing, and so our co-produced archives will continue to grow. We note that participation in the project, in particular the desire to share in certain digital archival spaces and not in others, is negotiated in a dynamic and personal way. Participation has waned over the months, and between art practices. People's decisions whether or not to share their art seems to be predicated on who might audience their work and the possibility of negative feedback or homophobic/transphobic backlash. We see each of these decisions as an important component of the co-produced digital archive. We further affirm participants' ownership of the archive by offering the choice to remove content. So far, no participants have asked for pieces to be removed from the archival spaces. Moving forward, we seek to engage participants more fully in deciding on the prompts and practices as so far all of the prompts have been researcher-produced. Participant direction and ownership over the archived visuals is a necessary component of the co-produced digital archive.

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[i] 2SLGBTQ+ refers to the identities: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and the plus stands for the gender identities and sexualities not included in the acronym. The term Two Spirit emerged in the 1990s, and is a term that rejects colonial labels of "L" "G" "B" and "T" and is a term of self identification used by Indigenous peoples. The term "Two-Spirit" "was a potential solution to what Native scholars and activists called the problem of naming, or making the many different sexual and gender identities that fall under the Two-Spirit umbrella legible across Native and non-Native cultures alike." (Geo Neptune 2018, para. 5).

[ii] We acknowledge that we do this work on unceded and unsurrendered Wolastokiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamaquoddy territory. The Peace and Friendship Treaties—first signed in 1725—recognize and affirm Mi'kmaq, Wolastokiyik and Passamaquoddy title over this territory (Atlantic Canada), and provide a framework for relations between nations (including settlers). We acknowledge the gender diversity that existed in this territory and that preceded the interruption of colonization (Reid, 2019). New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island were each founded on stolen land, and provide the geographical and societal context for our inquiry.

[iii] Our Facebook page can be seen at: https://www.facebook.com/pride.swell.art. Our Instagram can be seen, here: https://www.instagram.com/pride.swell/. Our Twitter account can be viewed, here: https://twitter.com/SwellPride.

[iv] We capitalize the 'W' in White and Whiteness in order to put the scholarship and activism of scholarship of Eve Ewing (2020) into practice as she asks us—through explicitly capitalizing White and Whiteness—to confront the ways that the "seeming invisibility [of Whiteness] permits White people to move through the World without ever considering the fact of their Whiteness…White people get to be only normal, neutral, or without any race at all." (para. 8)

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