

Montreal's Gay Village: A Multi-Generational Oral History and Documentary Film

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ABSTRACT

Montreal's Gay Village: A Multi-Generational Oral History and Documentary Film

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Montreal's Gay Village: outlawed, out-dated, or just out late? Through a multi-generational queer oral history, this research-creation documentary project explores Montreal's Gay Village, a neighbourhood that is in an economic downturn (Valiante 2015). By unearthing the neighbourhood's and community's heavily charged history through the personal stories of local community members, this documentary project offers contextualization to a place that is changing rapidly. By including LGBTQ+ community members of all ages, this documentary attempts to put multiple generations of queer people in conversation with one another as the dynamic relationships between the place, its history, interpretations of its history, and individual's varying lived experiences within the space are examined. How has the evolution of Montreal's Gay Village both as a place (physically) and a space (its socio-political positioning) impacted identities - both personal and communal? How does intergenerational dialogue, or a lack thereof, contribute to an understanding of spaces and their significance, both symbolic and material?

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Accessing the Project

Entre Papineau et St-Hubert: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PTcrHdLkhY>

While this cut of the documentary is nearly complete, the following work remains to be done:

- The voiceover will be recorded in a sound booth.
- Archival images will be added where indicated.
- The title card will be redone.
- The sound and music will be fine-tuned.
- French subtitles will be added.

Introduction

Shortly after getting my driver's license when I was 17, before I had any understanding of my sexual identity, I would often find myself getting into my car, driving towards Montreal's Gay Village (The Village), doing a couple of laps down Sainte-Catherine Street and then heading home. I wasn't really sure why I was doing it and I never got out of my car, but I kept finding myself drawn to those streets.

To the east of Montreal's downtown core, The Village encompasses the dozen blocks between St-Hubert and Papineau between René Lévesque and Ontario Street. The commercial heart of The Village runs along Sainte-Catherine Street and is centered around Metro Beaudry. Gay establishments in Montreal weren't always located in this area; they used to be based further west, more downtown, and scattered across the city. However, in attempts to "clean up" the city prior to the 1976 Montreal Olympics, gay bars and establishments were raided and shut down (Chamberlain 249). Although homosexual acts were decriminalized in Canada in 1969 (Hunt and Zacharias 36), these raids were executed under the guise of morality laws. Following these raids, in the early 1980s, LGBTQ+ establishments began to pop up in Montreal's east end, which was then a decrepit and less policed area on the outskirts of town. Since then, this area has been through a number of phases of growth and change, accommodating various portions of Montreal's LGBTQ+ populations in different ways (Podmore 2006). In 1999, this area was formally recognized by the municipal government as Montreal's Gay Village (Hunt and Zacharias 36) and is currently managed by the Commercial Development Corporation of the Village, an organization dedicated to supporting the commercial and economic development of the neighbourhood, as well as Fierté Montreal, a group that organizes cultural and gay pride events.

The first time I went into a bar in The Village was in 2007, the summer after my first year of CEGEP. A good friend's "older friend" brought us to Bar le Drugstore (Drugstore) and showed us the ropes. As I knew it, Drugstore was a massive 9+storey lesbian sports bar. Groups of all ages could be found scattered around the bar: drinking, playing pool, and relaxing. That fall, I joined Dawson College's LGBTQ+ club, built a gay network, and started spending multiple nights per week in The Village. Soon enough, The Village and especially Drugstore began to feel like a second home where I would come on nights when I needed to let loose, to relax, or when I didn't know what else to do with myself. I could show up almost any night of the

week and be sure to run into someone I knew. This went on for years, and then, suddenly, without any obvious reason, we all stopped going.

Over the past few years, a number of Montreal's iconic LGBTQ+-run businesses have closed their doors: Complex Bourbon in 2014, Club Sandwich in 2014, Club Parking in 2011, and most notably Drugstore in October 2013. Many of these spaces remain vacant while others have been replaced, many with mainstream chain businesses and restaurants. These bar closures are part of a trend across North America dubbed "the death of the gay village" or "death of the gay bar" where iconic gay establishments, one by one, have begun to fall (Thomas 2011, Spears 2011, Luke and Blair 2014) and where gay villages have begun to "degay" and become more mainstream (Collins 2004). Discourse equally began sprouting, suggesting that gay villages are no longer relevant and no longer serve a purpose for the current LGBTQ+ community (Aguirre-Livingston 2011).

In 2014-2015, I began attempting to spend time in The Village again but couldn't figure out where to go. Even though my old haunt Bar Le Drugstore was closed, there were a slew of other bars I could go to but nothing felt quite right. I couldn't find other women or a space where I felt like I belonged. A lot of the bars and clubs felt empty and there were countless for sale/rent signs in the storefronts along Sainte-Catherine Street. The Village was undeniably less vibrant than it had been a few years earlier. Was the discourse about gay villages no longer being useful accurate? I had trouble imagining that a space that had so recently played a vital role in my identity formation would no longer be relevant to the next generation. On the other hand, mainstream acceptance of diverse sexual-orientations had evolved quite quickly. Regardless, with so many businesses in the neighbourhood closing, something was blatantly changing in The Village. After all of the victories of the gay rights movement and such a quickly evolving socio-political context for LGBTQ+ people in Montreal and internationally, is The Village still relevant as a site of community formation and does the neighbourhood retain any cultural significance for Montreal's LGBTQ community? Do different generations of LGBTQ people relate to The Village differently since they have experienced the neighbourhood in such different socio-political climates? How is the unique history of this neighbourhood passed on? How can I use a documentary film format to put different generations into conversation?

The Project

Making use of my background in filmmaking, my extensive LGBTQ+ network, and my curiosity, I began this research creation project in hopes of answering these questions. Four years later, I have produced *Entre Papineau et St-Hubert*, an oral history project in the form of a documentary film. This film explores the ongoing role of Montreal's Gay Village and its heavily charged history through the stories of LGBTQ+ community members of all ages. The following chapters will explain the theoretical framework through which the project was conceived, outline the methods employed during production, and include my reflections on the production process and my findings.

Entre Papineau et St-Hubert was shot onsite, outdoors along Sainte-Catherine Street in Montreal's Gay Village. In total, I conducted 17 interviews with 22 local LGBTQ+ people of all different ages. Some interviews were filmed with single individuals, others with couples or two friends. Viewers meet eight of these individuals or pairs. These eight groups take viewers on a tour of The Village, introduce its key locations both past and present, and tell their personal stories about their experiences in the space. To offer a comparative lens, interviewees from a wide range of generations discuss the same places and topics; highlighting the parallels and differences in experiences between different generations of local LGBTQ+ people. Each location visited is used as a catalyst to discuss either a pivotal point of local LGBTQ+ history or to highlight a problem that is presently preventing The Village from effectively serving as a community building space for Montreal's current LGBTQ+ community.

Overall, this film presents a relatable overview of Montreal's LGBTQ+ history through individuals' intimate stories. This history serves to contextualize The Village's current form and role in fostering community. Across all of the interviews, the ongoing importance and usefulness of The Village is highlighted regardless of the age of the interviewees. However, it is made clear that the businesses themselves have failed to stay current and up to date, making The Village less popular in its current form.

Chapter 1: Preproduction- Theoretical and Contextual Framework

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of this project, defines key terms and concepts, and elaborates upon the motivation for many of my choices. In the following paragraphs, the role of queer space and Gay Villages will be explored and a distinction will be made between ‘place’ and ‘space’. The role of history and intergenerational dialogue in relation to the understanding and production of space, specifically queer space, will be examined. Finally, a brief media review notes the current conventions of place-based storytelling and Queer Oral History practices.

So, What is a Gay Village?

For this project, Gay Villages are considered through the lens of critical geography studies as queer space. While academic areas such as sociology and queer theory have explored the notion of queer space from a variety of perspectives¹, this project understands queer space as actively produced gay and lesbian space; the reterritorialization of heterosexual space working in opposition to heterosexual space (Oswin 89). By visibly marking specific territory as gay/queer and occupying it with queer bodies, these spaces reveal how all other space is understood as heterosexual while demonstrating that this heterosexual space is not organic but rather actively produced as “heterosexual, heterosexist and heteronormative” (Bell and Valentine 18).

Academic work has examined queer space at length and its importance has been noted for a multitude of reasons. Queer space has been found to be important in order to find peers and potential romantic partners (Bryson 2005), to organize for political activism (Binnie and Valentine 1999), to find safety from sexual-orientation based discrimination (Chamberlain 1993), and as a site to explore LGBTQ+ identities (Miceli 2002). As homosexual identities and practices are positioned as norms in these spaces (something unique to queer space), exploration of LGBTQ+ identity in queer space is thought to bolster individuals’ acceptance of the LGBTQ+ element of their identity; increasing self-esteem and confidence for those exploring their identity

¹ Other work, such as Kath Browne’s 2006 “Challenging Queer Geographies,” influenced by queer theory’s de-essentialization of homosexual identity, explains queer space as distinct from gay and lesbian space. Browne positions queer space as fluid space that deconstructs and transgresses normative sex, gender, and orientation binaries. This alternate definition of queer space positions gay and lesbian space as minimally resistant to hegemonic norms as it serves to reinforce the homo/heterosexual binary which has served to marginalize those who engage in homosexual acts. This alternate definition of queer space is useful as it reveals some limitations of the gay and lesbian space. However, as this definition is more conceptual than concrete and generally excludes Gay Villages as queer spaces, for the purposes of this project, queer space will be understood as gay and lesbian space.

(Miceli 2002, Deehan et al. 2013). Equally, researchers such as Nash suggest that these spaces are vital for the formation and validation of a “distinct and cohesive gay and lesbian minority group” (Nash 2005: 129). As such, queer space, and by extension Gay Villages, should be understood as constructive for both individual and communal identity development and formation (Nash 2005, Bryson 2005).

While all Gay Villages might be considered queer space, queer space can exist beyond a Gay Village. Therefore, it is worth considering the ongoing role of Gay Villages specifically. Nathaniel Lewis’s examination of Ottawa’s Gay Village helps to shed light on the ongoing importance of distinct Gay Villages. Ottawa’s Gay Village was formally recognized rather recently, in 2011. In Ottawa, the formal marking of a Village was found to hold symbolic importance as a means of “rectifying a [very recent] history of invisibility and ongoing insecurity” (239, 241). This study suggests that Villages remain sites of safety for LGBTQ+ people, as they continue to habitually face harassment (largely verbal) in public spaces (238-239). Though personal networks and alternate queer space had existed in the absence of a formalized Village, Lewis found these spaces and networks to be less visible, difficult to find for newcomers, and exclusionary for certain classes or “segments of the community” (239, 241).

While Montreal has many queer spaces outside of The Village, locating them can be a challenge. I regularly receive messages from individuals who are unable to locate queer space or community when arriving to Montreal. I have come to understand that while they are aware of The Village, it is not what they are looking for in their search for queer space and that the alternative spaces are often out of reach.

While Gay Villages can be considered an accessible and inclusive site for LGBTQ+ people, these spaces have equally been found to produce a host of exclusions (Lewis 2011). Dereka Rushbrook suggests that “the term gay space or queer space implies coherence and homogeneity that do not exist...which conceals exclusionary practices predicated on other axes of difference” such as class, race, and gender (203). Throughout the literature on queer space, there is similar mention of inclusions and exclusions. To incorporate this critical perspective into my research, I sought to interview as diverse a collection of participants as possible in terms of age, race, gender, and sexual identity in order to better understand who feels excluded or marginalized in this space. While the participants who appear in the final version of *Entre*

Papineau et St-Hubert are not quite as diverse as I had hoped, I believe that my difficulty recruiting a diverse group of participants who were eager to talk about The Village may point to the fact that certain groups are excluded or feel uncomfortable in this space. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Space + Place and History

Both of the terms place and space are used throughout this document and thus a distinction should be made between the two concepts. Space is dynamic, relational, and abstract while place is concrete, stable, and specific (Skeggs. et al 2004). Space is place produced in relationships to that which situates it (power, identity, culture) (Skeggs et al. 1840). Understanding space as being actively produced, allows for a single place, in this case The Village, to be understood as simultaneously being several spaces: each produced by a different generation who experiences the relational powers which situate it differently. The initial premise of this research is that this singular place might be understood as very different spaces by the different generations spending time in it, thus creating different relationships between individuals from different generations and The Village.

In order to understand how multiple generations of LGBTQ+ people related to The Village differently, I needed to position this project as a history project. Exploring The Village's history was the best way to understand how varying power dynamics have produced this space differently across time and impacted how individuals experience this place differently. Additional research on place and space suggests that any place's identity can be understood as a mix of its past, present, and future (Massey 1995). The work of documentary filmmaker Kenuajuak in particular, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2, reveals that all characteristics of a place can be understood as being from either "then" or "now"; positioning present identity as relational to past identity (Kenuajuak 1999). This dichotomy of past vs present emerged in a very strong way during my interviews. All participants, except for the very youngest individual, who was newly experiencing The Village, vacillated back and forth between discussing how The Village "was" compared to how it "is"; the interviewees seemingly unable to discuss the place's current form except in relationship to its past form. I am not certain if this pattern would have emerged so distinctly if The Village had not recently undergone so many dramatic changes such as the shutting down of many once prominent bars.

Articulating the distinction between past and present, Doreen Massey explains that a location's identity is dependent upon "particular, rival, interpretations of its past"; this relationship to its past is not organic but remembered and interpreted (184). Therefore, the present of a place can be understood in multiple ways, depending upon an individual's or community's understanding (or lack of understanding) of its past. Understanding place in this way, as relational to *interpretations* of its past, helps position this project's understanding of the evolution of this place as being an evolution in relationship to its remembered past. What then happens if the history of a place is not passed down between generations? Or if different generations have an inaccurate understanding of their community's history?

Intergenerational Dialogue

I determined that to examine community identity and the community's relationship to this place, I would need to engage with multiple generations and interrogate of the role of intergenerational dialogue in this community. With most minority groups, individuals usually come from a family of that minority. However, with LGBTQ+ individuals that is rarely the case. While minority histories and political and social coping strategies are usually organically passed down through families, this is less likely to happen in the LGBTQ+ community. If "our view of history shapes the way we view the present, and therefore it dictates what answers we offer for existing problems" (Crabtree 2013), then consistent tracking of queer history and easy access to this information is especially important for the queer population as it continues to face ongoing marginalization and discrimination (Lewis 2011).

As many once central and seminal queer spaces are closing in Montreal, their accompanying histories are not particularly being captured or marked. Though a number of factors limit intergenerational communication within the queer community (Grube 1991, Hajek and Giles 2002, Fox 2007), the closing of these spaces shared by multiple generations further limits the possibility of oral histories organically being passed down from one generation to the next. While the enormous club and bar venues that used to make up most of this area were patronized by multiple generations of queer people, I've noticed that the newer, smaller spaces appear to be occupied by those from more distinct and divided age groups.

The challenges of intergenerational dialogue in this community is yet further hindered as age-based dismissive behavior of elders has been found by researchers such as Fox to be

especially prominent in the LGBTQ+ community (Fox 36), leading to a lack of intergenerational communication (Hajek and Giles 704). Hajek and Giles suggest that older LGBTQ+ people are marginalized in queer spaces, that their engagement in the spaces is “time limited”; when they hit 35 years old and are conceived of as having lost their sexual attractiveness (Hajek and Giles 704). A 2002 study of gay men in Phoenix, identified significant communicative boundaries between the young and old due to age stereotypes and misconceptions where the younger group expected all communication from the older group to be a sexual advance, while the older group feared any communication being incorrectly conceived of as such (Fox 33). This study suggests that as a result of these stereotypes and misconceptions, the groups limit communication and misunderstand one another when they do communicate.

A similar study in the late 1980s suggests a major generational division exists between those who were socialized before and after the Stonewall Riots that began the North American gay rights movement (Grube 1991). While those socialized pre-Stonewall usually assimilated into heterosexual norms in order to be safe and successful, those socialized post-Stonewall, as a political stance, were more visible with their homosexual identities and called for the avoidance of subcultural institutions (Grube 120-122). Conflict emerged between the two groups as each saw the other as both a failure and a threat to their well-being. As a result, distaste emerged between the two groups and resulted in “mutual avoidance.” Though this research is quite old, it supports my hypothesis that a changing socio-political climate can alter the way in which different generations understand certain spaces. While one group saw subcultural institutions as necessary for safety, the next conceived of them as politically regressive.

Thus, this project positions intergenerational dialogue as being ambivalently situated as at once intragroup (due to sexual minority status) while being intergroup (due to age-based discontinuities). In my research, I expected to use oral history and place-based conversations to explore intergenerational disagreements, discontinuities, stereotypes, and misconceptions. However, none emerged in any prominent way. The most notable difference between the existing research and the current state of Montreal’s Gay Village was that gay men did not appear to age-out of the space and become unwelcome due to a perceived decrease in sexual desirability related to advanced age. On the contrary, throughout all of my interviews, The Village was understood as primarily being occupied by and catering to older men. Further, I was surprised not to find any evidence of intergenerational prejudice or stereotypes, even when interviewees were pressed for

their opinions on the older or younger generations. Instead, what became clear to me was that there is a complete disconnect between generations resulting from a lack of interest. When asked to discuss interactions with those of a different generation, participants had trouble identifying many instances of intergenerational exchange, but spoke of those they had as being insignificant but pleasant. The scope of my research did not allow for a more thorough interrogation of the reasons for the lack of intergenerational communication, however, it is abundantly clear that there is very little (if any) intergenerational communication in Montreal's LGBTQ+ community. I wonder, how does this lack of intergenerational dialogue impact the understanding of The Village, its history, and its significance? This topic will be explored further in Chapter 3.

Queer Oral History + Documentary Film

Beginning in 1990, a trend emerged of recording collective oral histories in order to write queer histories; covering previously undocumented events or adding to broader historical records that had marginalized queer voices. Books like Allain Berube's 1990 *Coming out under fire*, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis's 1993 publication *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, and Esther Newton's 1993 *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: sixty years in America's first gay and lesbian town* in part, all used the testimony of individual LGBTQ+ folk in order to reveal and unearth larger historical trends and to paint vivid pictures of what life was like for LGBTQ+ people in these various contexts and places.

More recently, an abundance of video and audio based Queer Oral History projects have surfaced and are increasingly accessible online. David Alder, a filmmaker, and Jeremy Yamashiro, an anthropologist, developed *The Queer Oral History Project (QOHP)* in 2009, a collection to which they are continually making additions. This collection includes the personal stories of any individual who wishes to contribute but is mainly comprised of stories from people living in San Francisco's Bay Area. This project has the goal of "creating and preserving a living history shared across generations" and the project's founders hope to build a bridge between older and younger generations who may not understand one another. Much like my project, *QOHP* identifies a lack of intergenerational communication in the LGBTQ+ community, resulting in a younger generation who is somewhat unaware of the history that precedes them, coupled with an older generation who doesn't understand the context in which the new generation is growing up. By posting these videos online, especially through social media, the

founders hope to facilitate bridging this gap. However, though dissemination online may help engage the younger generation, this mode of distribution may exclude the older generation that they (and I) are equally trying to reach as this generation is significantly less likely to spend time online, especially on social media websites (Zickuhr and Madden 2012). Projects hoping to reach several generations should consider dissemination through multiple channels, both online and offline.

Explorations of queer spaces have been central to many queer oral history based documentary films. Broader subjects, themes, and issues emerge through the explorations of these spaces. Overall, these projects highlight the importance that specific sites have for LGBTQ+ communities across the Western world. Kevin Smith's 2007 film *Small Town Gay Bar* explores the role of gay bars in southern rural USA. This film positions gay bars as playing a dual role. Firstly, they serve as space of escape for LGBTQ+ people who are marginalized and discriminated against in their daily lives. These bars are also sites for tension and conflict to emerge between queer people and the bigoted communities in which they live. This demonstrates the disruptive effect that queer space continues to have and points to its ongoing relevance. Though the context of Montreal is much different than the small town examined in this documentary, the themes about the importance of this space emerge in much the same way for some of my participants.

The inclusion of personal anecdotes (short accounts of particular incidents or events) is present in many of these films and is particularly effective in Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weisman's 1992 *Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*. This film tells the story of what life was like for Canadian queer women in the 1950s and 1960s by interweaving historical media coverage, old personal footage, and interviews. These interviews are largely made up of amusing personal anecdotes. This use of anecdote serves to slowly reveal a highly political and messy history in a light and relatable way. The viewer learns what it was like to live as a queer woman during that period by being carried along with the interviewees as they tell their stories. The restrictive laws and discriminatory policies faced by this population are not explicitly explained, but are nevertheless clearly understood as they are slowly revealed through the stories told, as the women share their tips, tricks, and strategies used to work around the restrictions that they faced in their lives. In this sense, the use of anecdote allows for a deeper understanding of the socio-political environment of the period than if they were explicitly told.

Inspired by this use of anecdote, my project equally attempts to reveal history through entertaining personal stories and conversations in order to bring the history to life in a relatable way.

Two documentaries, *Is the Village Dying?* and *Village Voices*, both examine the economic viability of Gay Villages. Though they reach opposite conclusions about the ability for these types of spaces to economically self-sustain, both films suggest the continued relevance of these spaces regardless of their economic success. An economic examination of these spaces is beyond the scope of my research as I am interested in whether or not The Village is relevant and significant to the current LGBTQ+ community, not whether or not this relevance translates into economic sustainability. In an effort to avoid taking an economic angle I intentionally avoided the inclusion of business owners and politicians.

Beyond its economic examination of Gay Villages, *Is the Village Dying?* points to the continued relevance of Toronto's Gay Village as a "home" for the city's LGBTQ+ community, providing a sense of comfort and community, even for those who no longer go to the space. Drawing on the conclusions of this film, I accepted the idea that The Village could continue to be perceived of as a "home" and may continue to hold value for LGBTQ+ individuals who no longer spend time in the space. Even when these spaces are not occupied by queer bodies, they may retain symbolic power and hold cultural value. This idea influenced both my research question as well as my decision to include participants who no longer actively spent time in The Village.

Having reviewed over ten North American queer oral history based documentaries including additional titles such as Laurent Gagliardi's 1995 *Quand L'Amour est Gai*, Linda Goode Bryant and Laura Poitras's 2003 *Flag Wars*, and Rodrigue Jean's 2008 *Hommes à louer*, I discovered an extreme imbalance in the voices present. Overwhelmingly, these films center around white, male voices. As such, my project attempts to predominantly feature these missing voices; favouring the voices of women and visible minorities whenever possible.

Chapter 2: Production + Methodology

Undertaking research creation allowed for the production of a Queer Oral History project in the form of a documentary movie. For this project, I combined the conventions of place-based storytelling in documentary film with Queer Oral History traditions and practices. Both place-based and walking interviews were conducted. In this chapter, I will explain how these multiple methodologies complimented each other in the production of *Entre Papineau et St-Hubert* and I will discuss the specific and evolving methods employed.

Methodology

Why Research Creation?

I primarily chose to undertake this project through research creation as it often facilitates knowledge dissemination more easily than traditional text-based research (Chapman and Sawchuk 4). Since I had identified a probable lack of intergenerational communication within Montreal's LGBTQ+ community and established that this lack of communication has likely resulted in a skewed understanding of collective community identity, I felt that using my research to help bridge this gap as much as possible was a priority. Therefore, knowledge dissemination was at the front of my mind and research creation was the obvious choice.

The form of a documentary video, in particular, seemed ideal as it allows for interviews to be shared in an accessible format for many. By making this project available online (which it will be eventually), the younger generation of LGBTQ+ people in Montreal will have access to the history of the space in a format that is familiar to them. This could afford a younger generation of LGBTQ+ Montrealers a better understanding of the history that shapes the spaces in which they currently engage and inform their behaviours both within the LGBTQ+ community and as political bodies in a socio-political climate which continues to marginalize their identities. The desire to maximize knowledge dissemination equally led to the choice of creating a single film rather than multiple shorter clips; in hopes that viewers would watch the entire piece rather than picking and choosing the portions that seem most interesting or familiar to them.

I propose that taking up this Queer Oral History project through research-creation allows for more “intuitive ways of knowing” than classical research in terms of both the final product and the production process (Chapman and Sawchuk 3). By executing this project through

documentary video, through the final product I wanted to achieve a more sensuous and situated form of knowledge as voice and moving images allow for the ambience, vibe, and soul of the space to emerge in a way in which writing alone cannot. Rather than simply reading about The Village and imagining what it is like, viewers get to see and hear the space as well as witness how other people behave within its boundaries.

The process of filming and editing a documentary film required me as a researcher to deepen my engagement with my subject matter in a way that would not have been possible if my research was text-based. To explore potential aesthetic themes and capture b-roll footage, I spent time in The Village at every time of day which allowed me to get to know the space in a way that I never would have if I hadn't been hunting for "the right shot". For example, I was there on several occasions before dawn to capture sunrise footage. On one occasion, I witnessed the transition and blending between partiers heading home and residents heading to work. It created a very unique atmosphere in the streets and was an element of life in The Village that I had not previously considered. While not explicitly represented in the film, this experience contributed to my understanding of The Village as more than a destination for nightlife but as a complex, multifaceted neighbourhood. On another occasion, I was accosted by street-punks: witnessing first-hand a topic that was discussed by many of my interviewees and was explored in one of my deleted chapters². I also had to learn the patterns of foot traffic in The Village in order to minimize filming during periods when I would risk getting too many people in the background of my shots. This forced me to consider when (and why) people spend time on The Village's main strip. Overall, the practicalities of filming allowed me to get to know my subject in ways I could not have anticipated and would not have experienced had I not been approaching this research as a creative practice.

Place-Based Storytelling Through Documentary Film

Place-based storytelling³, often done through documentary film, is media that concentrates on physical locations and use locations in multiple ways. Some place-based films use environment as a tool to reveal and examine culture, while other films explore environments as a character by engaging with the people that exist within the space. In this sense, people can be

² I created several chapters that did not make the final cut of *Entre Papineau et St-Hubert*.

³ Place-based storytelling is a term used in media and film studies (Miller et al 2011, Potter 2017).

used to better understand space and space can be used to examine people. Regardless, through my examination of many place-based documentaries, it appears that place and people are bound together; examining one reveals the other.

The role of history and tradition as formative to space is central in many place-based documentaries. Bobby Kenuajuak's 1999 *My Village in Nunavik* begins by situating the director's village as a product of its history by speaking with elders and narrating the village's origins. This documentary examines changes in generations by exploring the village and the behaviours of those who live in it. Behaviours and the village's characteristics are suggested as either being from "then" or "now;" positioning all characteristics as either consistent or digressing from tradition. A similar trend of "then" and "now" emerged in a very distinct way throughout my interviews. Participants only seemed able to discuss their engagement with the current form of The Village in comparison to how they use to engage with the space in the past.

Documentary film in general has also been used to put people in conversation with one another. Lucie Lachapelle's 1996 *Mosaic Village* slowly reveals the complex interconnectedness of the diverse inhabitants of Cote des Neiges' multi-ethnic residents. As viewers watch members of diverse ethnic groups discuss and engage with the same location, unexpected parallels emerge between the groups and a conversation develops through the film as interviewees support and add to each other's statements. By having participants engage with the same place, specifically by walking along the same street, my project attempts to create a similar dynamic between interviewees. Specifically, by editing interviews from participants from multiple generations together in this way, I have attempted to create a simulation of the intergenerational dialogue that I found lacking within the community. I hope that this creation of intergenerational dialogue through video might serve as an invitation to community members to do so in real life.

Question Bridge, a multimedia art project aimed at exploring and deconstructing black male identity in the United States, similarly attempts to create dialogue within a minority community through video on its interactive website. Text and video on the website encourages "black men of all ages and backgrounds" to ask and answer questions by submitting video clips in attempts to create "deeply personal conversations." While my call to action is less explicit, limited to a single line in my closing voice over, both myself and the creators of *Question Bridge* attempt to use our work to increase dialogue, especially intergenerational dialogue, in hopes of strengthening minority communities.

Many documentaries such as Andrew Faiz's *Flemington Park: The Global Village* and Astra Taylor's *Examined Life* use walking as method during interviews. Beyond facilitating a visual exploration of The Village, I used walking interviews as they are thought to produce richer, more intimate data, especially when examining space or landscape (Evans and Jones 849). This is partly because, during walking interviews, participants are prompted by the meaning present in their surroundings. As seen in *Flemington Park: The Global Village*, especially when these walks occur in familiar territory, they can garner more animated and intimate responses than during static interviews. This practice appears to trigger memories and results in slight re-enactments of the past as the interviewees demonstrate their old behaviours and habits for the camera. By using walking interviews, I hoped to evoke the same response from my participants, believing that the space would trigger memories and stories.

Walking interviews proved to be a very effective method. Walking served multiple roles. Walking around a familiar space triggered memories for all participants; certain buildings reminded them of the existence of former bars or clubs which they then discussed. This unexpected triggering of memories resulted in very engaging content- where participants spoke with evident emotion. Walking also served to put participants at ease. Things discussed while walking seemed to be conveyed in a more candid, relaxed way. Participants were less camera shy as they could focus on walking around and responding to their environment, rather than listening to questions and positioning themselves in front of the camera.

Queer Oral History Traditions

Coming across the book *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* completely changed the ways in which I undertook this research. Though I was familiar with documentary storytelling, the participant-led nature of oral history practices and community-minded motivation behind queer oral history practices in particular resonated with me and my motivations. I decided to use Queer Oral History conventions to dictate my methods in hopes of building a product that would be more community-built rather than auteur driven. I wanted this project to be 'our' story, not 'my' story. In theory, when Queer Oral History methods are followed, the product of queer oral history projects should be understood as community artefacts (Chenier 253).

Queer Oral History traditions seek to challenge the relationship between researcher and subject; deconstructing the traditionally hierarchical relationship between research and subject (Chenier 251). Individuals' histories and stories are thought of as community resources. Thus, both the telling of and capturing of queer oral histories should be considered a "tacit mutual responsibility" between elders and younger generations: both the labour of telling and of recording should be understood as equal (Boyd and Ramirez 5).

In practice, Queer Oral History tradition calls for a collaborative interview process during which authorial authority is blurred. With this method, participants are given space to tell their stories in their own voice, given some control over the interview process, and provided the opportunity to challenge the interpretations and presentations of their testimony (Chenier 252). I planned my interview process in this spirit. All interviews were interviewee-led: they were given a broad and vague idea of what my research was about and told to talk about what was most important to them. Questions were only asked when participants appeared to require a prompt to keep talking and were mainly follow up questions about topics they were already discussing. Participants were equally given control over the location for their interview, by selecting the interview location for static interviews, or by choosing where to lead the crew during walking interviews.

Additionally, I attempted to foster a relaxed and informal research relationship with my participants through mutual disclosure and the use of casual language (Kivitz 2005). In particular, for participants who didn't already know me, I intentionally disclosed an anecdote that revealed my situated identity as a queer person who spends time in The Village. This disclosure and relaxed relationship in theory served to align myself with the subjects, as being part of their community, in attempts to deconstruct the traditionally hierarchical relationship between research and subject that queer oral history tradition mandates (Chenier 251).

Additionally, Queer Oral History practices necessitate the retention of participants' specific use of vocabulary in the final product so as not to inflect their stories with current politics or identities (Halperin 1990). In order to encourage this, during interviews I made sure to mirror participants' language. This is particularly vital as different generations of queer people use and understand certain vocabulary in different and sometimes conflicting ways (Hajek and Giles 2002, Fox 2007). As a media producer, I struggled with this; feeling an authorial

responsibility not to replicate the use of arguably destructive or regressive vocabulary. However, as an emergent oral historian, I very much understood the importance of accepting the use of participants' specific language as it nods to their situated and generational identity and vocabulary use can hold very specific personal meaning. Additionally, as the existence of this population has historically been denied or repressed, the real names of participants are necessarily included in these projects as a remedy to claim visibility (Newton 1993).

Production Process

In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss the interview process and ensuing challenges. Interviews were conducted in two rounds, each with a different recruitment process and slightly different methods which I will explain. All interviews were conducted on-site in The Village and used walking as process. Aligning with my Queer Oral History methodology, I developed and attempted to execute participant-led interviews with an intentionally informal research relationship.

Overall, I conducted seventeen interviews: twelve during the first round of interviews and four during the second round of interviews. I interviewed each participant a single time either through a walking or single-site interview. During walking interviews, participants led me around The Village. Walking interviews were expected to provide my core content and lead to the majority of my findings. During single-site interviews, participants selected a specific location in The Village and the entirety of the interview was conducted at that site. Single-site interviews were conducted to explore topics and locations in a more in-depth than would be possible during the walking interviews and to provide light anecdotes about The Village. All of the single-site interviews were conducted with solo participants. I asked those participating in walking interviews to bring along a friend or partner if possible which resulted in five of the nine walking interviews being done in pairs.

First Round of Interviews

During the first round of filming, I interviewed fifteen participants. Eight of the participants were interviewed during single-site interviews. Seven participants were interviewed during five walking interviews; three conducted with solo participants and two with pairs.

Recruitment

Trying to avoid the pitfalls of other LGBTQ+ non-fiction, I wanted to include as diverse a group of people in my research as possible and to specifically include the stories of those with historically marginalized voices within the queer community: people of colour, Trans and non-binary people, immigrants, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, and individuals who identify as bisexual. Priority was also given to female participants. I began recruiting LGBTQ+ identified participants in the summer of 2015. I started with a general call-out for anyone wishing to participate, followed by more targeted call-outs for specific voices that I had yet to locate. I put up flyers in The Village and posted Craigslist ads but neither garnered any results. Reaching out through my personal network on Facebook and in person was much more successful. Many of my friends and contacts were interested in participating and several put me in touch with other potential participants. I also found a few participants through posts made to local LGBTQ+ Facebook groups.

Recruiting as diverse of group of participants as I had hoped for was difficult, with the vast majority of those coming forward being cis and white. While my attempts to recruit more people of colour were successful, my attempts to recruit any indigenous and multiple Trans or non-binary identified individuals were not. I attempted to recruit these two demographics by reaching out to queer contacts of mine from these demographics, asking if they might know anyone from these demographics interested in participating. While searching for a diverse range of participants, I was asked on two occasions if their stories/experiences/take on the situation had to be positive. I believe that this suggests that these groups may feel excluded in this space or have had negative experiences there.

After submitting my Ethics Summary Protocol Form in June of 2015, the Ethics Committee identified Trans participants as being members of a vulnerable population. Though the focus of this research was not to specifically explore the life stories of Trans individuals- the inclusion of these voices felt particularly important to this project in order to gain a more complete understanding of this space by including the impressions of all community members. The perspectives of Trans individuals have often been left out of research about queer culture and queer space except when they are the focus of the research. I strongly believe that this group should not continue to be marginalized in work about queer populations. I updated by Ethics

Summary Protocol Form accordingly to include a few strategies to protect the interests of Trans participants.

My biggest challenge during recruitment was finding 18-19 year olds. As The Village is largely comprised of businesses restricted to those who are 18 years old and up (bars, clubs, sex shops, etc), including participants this age was critical to understanding how the youngest generation of LGBTQ+ people are currently experiencing this space. Emails sent to local LGBTQ+ youth organizations went unanswered and posts to CEGEP LGBTQ+ club Facebook groups were ‘liked’ but no one reached out. I visited Dawson’s LGBTQ+ club in person (and with a TimBit bribe) but the two people I spoke with there said they didn’t spend time in The Village. Reflections about the implications of recruiting this demographic are explored further in my footnotes⁴. Eventually, I was put in touch with a friend’s younger sister, who was eagerly exploring The Village. However, when we met for an interview, she turned out to be 16, which was younger than my CSP allowed, so we could not go forward with the interview. During a brief conversation with this individual, she told me that though she wanted to spend time in The Village there isn’t anywhere for her to go at her age. As a result, she is eagerly waiting until she turns eighteen to spend more time in this space. While I excluded participants who were under 18 years old from the scope of my research since I was advised that getting ethics clearance to interview LGBTQ+ youth would be difficult, it had not occurred to me how valuable their insight might have been. This experienced has left me with some unresolved questions. Do LGBTQ+ youth feel welcome in The Village? Is LGBTQ+ community age restricted? How does this impact intergenerational communication?

Crew

Interviews were conducted and filmed by myself and my assistant (and girlfriend at the time) Meghan O’Grady. My mother also helped out on two occasions: recharging batteries and transferring memory cards on a day when interviews were back-to-back, as well as serving as a pseudo body guard when I captured time-lapse footage of the sunrise. My primary assistant,

⁴ I believe that my difficulty recruiting 18-19 year olds who were interested in sharing their experiences about The Village was not a result of the youngest generation of LGBTQ+ people not needing The Village or queer space. Rather, I believe that my recruitment methods, of trying to recruit youth through LGBTQ+ organizations, was a misstep. By being part of these LGBTQ+ organizations, these individuals already had access to the difficult to locate non-Village LGBTQ+ space, diminishing the importance of The Village.

O'Grady, did the sound for all interviews and was second camera for walking interviews. While O'Grady had no formal training in film production or sound, her interest and knack for equipment made her well suited as an assistant for the project. She also served as a sounding board and participated in brainstorming sessions starting from the conception of the project. Her familiarity with the project and my own research process was exceptionally helpful during interviews. When interviewees didn't quite answer questions in the ways I was hoping for, she would rephrase and pose the question again- often resulting in deeper responses from interviewees.

Additionally, while I am largely read as an LGBTQ+ community outsider due to my very feminine gender representation (or so I'm told), O'Grady's more masculine gender representation was an invaluable tool for quickly building relaxed relationships with participants as she was immediately read by participants as being part of their community. While there may be other reasons that participants behaved differently with O'Grady than with me, I believe that it was because I was considered an outsider. I didn't notice this difference in behavior from participants who already knew me or from participants who seemed to listen to my small talk at the beginning of interviews where I intentionally revealed myself as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. On a number of occasions, partway through interviews, participants asked if O'Grady and I were a couple. When we confirmed that we were, they expressed surprise because they thought I was heterosexual. Following this, participants' demeanor with me changed completely; smiling more, appearing more relaxed, speaking more casually, and telling more candid stories. Furthermore, on days when I was shooting b-roll of the neighbourhood on my own, I would regularly get stopped and asked what I was doing- it was as if community members perceived me as an outsider, were being protective of their space, and were looking out for one another. On days when I shot b-roll with O'Grady, no one asked what we were doing- as if her evidently queer body validated our presence and engagement with the space. Overall, these feelings and observations make me wonder about the limitations of doing research in a community that you are not part of versus research in your own community. If I ever do more LGBTQ+ community research in the field, I will put more effort into intentionally identifying myself as a community member because I believe that insider status results in less guarded interactions with participants.

Interview Process

Walking Interviews

One week before their interviews, I asked participants to spend time thinking about previous experiences in the space and to reminisce about these experiences with their friends. I also asked them to look through their personal photos, recordings, or mementos associated with The Village and forward any that they would allow me to use.

Initially, participants were asked to meet the crew outside Beaudry Metro (at the heart of The Village) and then were asked to bring us to where they feel that The Village begins (usually identified as St Hubert street to the west or Papineau to the east). The walk to either extremity of the space was intended to put the participants at ease and to remind them of things that they would later pass by.

As Queer Oral History methodology emphasizes the importance of giving interviewees as much control as possible over the interview process, I began by providing participants with an overview of the structure of their interview. I hoped that by providing participants with as much information as possible, they would know what was expected of them and what to expect from me so they might feel more comfortable taking control of the interview. I explained that the main goal of the interview was for them to walk the crew around The Village and explain it to us as if we had never heard about it; to point out their favourite spots, tell us stories about their experiences there, tell us what they thought of different places, etc. I told each participant that they were in charge of the interview and that they should feel free to talk about what was most important to them. To give them an idea of how I would be interacting with them, I told them that when they ran out of things to say I would ask them some questions such as: What is the Gay Village? Why do you go here? Why do people go here? How is the space used? How do things work here? Are there unwritten rules? What used to be where? Beyond setting the expectations of the interviewees, I hoped that by telling participants this list of questions they might answer these questions on their own and have more ideas about what to discuss. Once the walks commenced, in the spirit of a collaborative, interviewee-led process, I only asked questions when participants became quiet and appeared to be in need to a prompt. Most of my interactions with participants were responses to things that they said rather than questions that directed to new topics. My follow-up questions were largely requests for them to expand upon or to clarify something they had said. I also shared my experience or opinion on the topic or location at hand. As a result,

these interviews were similar to conversations, especially as I became more comfortable with the informal interview process.

I also gave participants control of how they moved around The Village. They were free to lead us in any direction and to any spot they desired. While participants both spoke and were filmed while walking, any time we passed a particularly important location, or a location they had a story about, we stopped and shot static interview footage at those locations. This was done to create more stable, watchable footage as well as to give interviewees time to fully engage with these locations. Interviews concluded when participants expressed feeling that they had covered the entirety of The Village. At the end, I asked a few closing questions before ending filming.

Single-Site Interviews

I asked participants who were taking part in single-site interviews to select a specific spot in The Village in which to be interviewed and to prepare a personal story or anecdote associated with that location. In this sense, place was used as process during these interviews (Cowie 2012). Two locations emerged as particularly significant with *every* female participant suggesting Drugstore and many of the male-presenting participants suggesting Parc de L'Espoir. I was concerned that so many people had selected the same place so I asked participants to select other locations. As walking interviews have been found to produce more stories per interview than non-walking interviews (Evans and Jones 856), I attempted to integrate an element of walking as method for single-site interviews as well. Prior to the interview, I had planned to spend ten minutes walking in the street with the participants. As we walked, I asked them if the spots that we are passing meant anything special to them- if they did, to take a note but not to explain the space to me yet. I had hoped that these walks would trigger memories for participants and give them more to discuss during interviews. The effectiveness of this method is discussed below.

Interviews began by asking participants “in a couple sentences, can you tell me what is The Village?” This served as a starting point and allowed participants to discuss what stood out about The Village to them. This question organically led participants to address some of the questions that I had prepared. Participants were also asked to share a prepared story. Following the first question and the request to tell their prepared story, as with the walking interviews, additional questions were only asked when participants appeared to run out of things to say.

While most questions were follow-ups to the topic already being discussed, I brought the same standard list of questions to every interview (Appendix).

Reflections and Obstacles During the First Round of Interviews

Using walking as a method proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. Individuals participating in single-site interviews, expressed discomfort and confusion at my desire to have them walk around and take notes instead of immediately beginning in front of the camera. Some seemed jittery and nervous, while others simply expressed being eager to “start”. Insisting on these walks led to tension between myself and participants. Responding to these tensions and wanting to emphasize an interviewee-led process, I let go of walking as method for those participating in single-site interviews. I also did away with an element of walking as process during walking interviews. Initially, I met participants at Metro Beaudry and had them walk me to “the beginning” of The Village in hopes of the walk prompting memories. However, this method didn’t work. Participants were energetic and excited to begin the interviews; they had trouble staying quiet as we walked to the starting point. Comments and memories that mentioned in passing during this first walk were mostly not brought up a second time, and when they were, they were conveyed less energetically. Additionally, participants subtly suggested that meeting at Metro Beaudry to then walk elsewhere felt like poor planning and a waste of their time. While walking proved to be an extremely effective method for both putting participants at ease and sparking the telling of engaging stories, attempting to over-employ this method was ineffective.

While I modified my process, overall, place and walking as process was fundamental to the success of these interviews. For both walking and single-site interviews, I had asked participants to prepare a short story or anecdote related to The Village. Though they all suggested that they had many interesting experiences to share, universally, participants did not have stories prepared. Nonetheless, as they looked or walked around The Village, the very types of stories and anecdotes I had hoped to hear were organically told by participants. Consistent with Evans and Jones’ 2011 findings, I believe that had these interviews taken place in a location outside The Village, interviews would have been much shorter and far fewer personal stories and anecdotes about experiences in the space would have been told.

Creating a more open and perhaps collaborative interview process proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Familiar with a more formalized interview process, participants

seemed uncomfortable with self-led interviews. Participants expressed a desire to please me and wanted to know what kind of information, angle, and tone I was seeking. I told interviewees that I wasn't looking for any particular angle or opinion, that I was interested in learning what was important to *them*⁵. While I didn't want to over direct these interviews, participants were eager for direction. There was a learning curve at the beginning of interviews as participants became accustomed to the process. Additionally, participants largely assumed that I was only looking for positive stories about The Village. Though I reassured them that this was not the case, the few participants who had negative experiences to share began speaking about them tentatively and required ample encouragement to continue telling their stories.

Health Issues and Impact on Production

In October 2015, I suffered a significant concussion. The impact of the injury was not immediately evident, so I pushed through my final shoots in October and early November 2015. Having grown comfortable with the walking interview format and having saved some of the more history-focused interviews for the end, these final 2015 interviews were some of the strongest interviews. Unfortunately, in my diminished state, I deleted them. When I was allowed to progressively return to my studies in the Fall of 2017, I had to decide to either edit without my best content or to reshoot. With the input of my supervisor Liz Miller, we decided that reshooting four more targeted interviews made the most sense. The delay in completing the project as well as the decision to reshoot proved to be beneficial. A tighter focus during reshoots, which is expanded upon below, allowed for a more cohesive final product. Additionally, having several extra years to observe The Village, the community's engagement with it, and its evolution was useful. I am more confident in my findings and felt more comfortable drawing firm conclusions in *Entre Papineau and St-Hubert* since the conclusions that I drew and trends that I identified in 2015 still hold up in 2019.

⁵ Though I had specific research questions in mind (p.7), I did not reveal them to my participants. I wanted my participants to reveal their answers to these questions through their stories, rather than give me their opinion on the answer to these questions. Furthermore, I feared that if I revealed my research questions, participants risked spending their interviews filtering their dialogue and making a case for a specific answer.

Second Round of Interviews

The second time around, I set off to interview a pair of elders, a pair in their mid 40s, a pair in their mid 20s and a pair of 18-19 year olds. I specifically sought to recruit pairs as, during the first round of interviews, pairs created the most engaging content. The pair in their mid 40s was quickly recruited by my assistant- Emery, who was one of her colleagues, and his boyfriend, Marc. I was also easily able to recruit a pair in their mid 20s, Marly and Soraya, through a Montreal queer Facebook page. After posting at length online, I recruited Mariya, an 18 year old. Recruiting my target elder was a challenge. Knowing that elders would likely be understood as voices of authority, I had hoped to recruit participants who were not cis-men in order to avoid compounding the current dominance of these voices in queer media. While targeted posts in Montreal lesbian Facebook groups garnered interest and a few responses, no meetings came to fruition. I also reached out to Myriam Ginestier, a Montreal community leader, but she explained that she and her contacts did not have a strong relationship with The Village, having spent more time in the lesbian bars on St Denis. I was surprised by this information as I didn't know that St Denis had been a lesbian stronghold. Thankfully, my supervisor put me in touch with Professor Ross Higgins who reached out to his network. I spoke with several men who were eager to share their stories and ended up scheduling an interview with John Banks and Robert Tessier.

During the first round of interviews, I learned a lot about the history of The Village and was able to identify several key locations that resonated with my participants across multiple demographics. I chose to focus on four of these locations in my second round of interviews. Having four consistent locations discussed by all of the interviewees allowed for parallels to be drawn between generations and facilitated the editing process. Consistent with my first round of interviews, both walking and interviewee-led interviews were used as method. Participants walked between locations and were free to choose when to move on, how to get between locations, and were invited to bring the crew to additional locations along the way.

The four locations in the second round of shooting were: KOX/Code, Drugstore, Parc de L'Espoir, Renard. KOX/Code was one of the first clubs in The Village and has been reopened over the years under a series of different names. I selected this spot to discuss The Village's party scene across generations. Drugstore, as discussed in the introduction, was a sports bar frequented by women. I selected this spot as the closure of this establishment marked a shift in how women engage with The Village. Parc de L'Espoir is an open-air park that commemorates those who

have died from and live with AIDS. I selected this spot as it was pointed to as being very important to many male participants. Renard is a new and very popular lounge. I selected this spot in hopes that it would prompt participants to speak of The Village's future.

Since Renard, the bar that would hopefully prompt discussions of The Village's future, was located in the west end of The Village, I asked participants to meet the crew at the east end of The Village. I briefly explained the project and the interview process: that we wanted them to show us around The Village, tell us their stories, and point out any places that are especially significant to them. I also explained that there were a handful of locations where we would be intentionally stopping, but the locations were not revealed.

The second round of interviews went very smoothly. Being very comfortable with interviewee-led interviews as method, as well as having more knowledge about the history of The Village and people's feelings about it from the first round of interviews, allowed me to deeply lean into deconstructing the usual hierarchically relationship between interviewee and interviewer. These interviews naturally became conversations between myself and the participants, with us both sharing stories. As not to inflect their responses with my input, I would only share these stories once this second round of participants seemed to conclude their discussion of a specific place or specific topic. While some of the stories I shared were personal, most were the stories, opinions or impressions of other participants. The participants seemed interested, curious and surprised by the things I was telling them. It felt like I was broaching the gap between generations; telling the older generations the opinions of those from younger generations and telling the stories and histories to the younger generations. To some extent, I feel like these final interviews acted almost as proxies for actual intergenerational communication. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Post Production + Reflections

This chapter will discuss the editing process as well as include my reflections.

While filming in itself is an artistic practice, the editing process was the main site for research-from-creation⁶ as I sought to explore what specific types of knowledge could be produced through documentary film as I attempted to create/simulate a multi/intergenerational conversation between my participants. Twyla Tharp's concept of "scratching:" generating, retaining, inspecting, then transforming an idea, was embraced during the editing process. Shooting resulted in a large amount of footage. As I edited the film, "scratching" was used to develop and adapt several options for narrative arcs, themes and focuses as footage was combined, shuffled around and cut. Attempting to build a narrative, I used different coloured post-its on a wall and on my desk trying to combine, organize, and strategically place different topics, moods, and locations. Realizing that there were an infinite number of potential final products, I finally accepted that the final product, like all documentary film, would have to be partial and subjective.

The final product includes eight of the seventeen interviews that I conducted. I began editing by focusing on the four second-round interviews which included participants from four different generations. These interviews were with John + Robert (60s-70s), Marc and Emery (40s), Marly + Soraya (mid/late 20s), and Mariya (18). Combined, these four interviews didn't tell a cohesive or engaging story but kept reminding me of interesting moments in other interviews. One by one, I added in footage from four of the first round interviews- with Dean, Kitch + Richere, Joe, and Asilex. Footage of Dean, a 50 year-old transmasculine man, allowed for the inclusion of a deeper dive into activism-related historical events. Footage with Kitch + Richere (40s) brought a light and fun explanation of The Village's former party scene, a discussion of former lesbian spaces, and a unique perspective on The Village's current form. Footage of Joe (50s) was included to speak to the sexually charged nature of this space, something that other interviews mentioned but did not dive into. Including his interview was vital for framing how a sexual liberation for gay men resulted from an increase in rights. Finally, footage of Asilex (20s) was added as, through firsthand knowledge from having worked

⁶ Chapman and Sawchuk explain that in research-creation there are four subcategories: research-for-creation, research-from-creation, creative presentations of research, and creation-as-research.

throughout The Village, she quite concisely suggested a reason that area might be in decline- the businesses failed to be maintained and keep up with the standards of other Montreal bars.

Building all of my interviews into a cohesive story was a challenge. My supervisor gave me a chapter out of *Save the Cat*, a screenwriting handbook that helped layout an ideal narrative arc (Snyder 2005). While I initially identified the issues and events that appeared to evidently serve as the perfect rising action, turning points and a denouement, when I put these moments together on my Premier Pro timeline, I felt like something was missing; that I was overlooking major findings in my research, oversimplifying, trying to put oral history into a neat little box when it needs to be wild, incomplete, subjective, and messy. While I wrote out several potential narrative arcs and storytelling strategies, the content of my interviews simply could not so easily fit into any of my plans. My open-ended, participant-directed interview process produced a large amount and wide variety of content and information, making it difficult to funnel into the linear final product that I was trying to produce. At a loss, I decided to begin editing in chapters, starting with Parc de L'Espoir. This park, an HIV/AIDS memorial park located at the heart of The Village, was the perfect new starting point since it so easily highlights the generation disconnect in Montreal's LGBTQ+ community (discussed later). I continued editing chapter by chapter, working on the parts, topics and locations that seemed the most important and interesting.

Unintentionally, I again used walking and location as process. While editing, I spent a lot of time in The Village, walking the streets with different friends. As we walked, I pointed out locations and told the stories I had heard during my interviews. The content that made my final cut were the stories that I couldn't stop myself from telling when walking with friends; the stories and histories that my contacts consistently were surprised about. Working in this way; chapter by chapter, highlighting the most interesting, important and surprising parts, my film slowly evolved into a mostly historical piece. While I knew that going through The Village's history would be a fundamental component in understanding its current state, I had wildly underestimated just how much history existed in this space. The Village's history could not be contained to the introduction or first few chapters of my film. There were simply too many pivotal pieces of history that both my contacts and I had been unaware of that completely changed my understanding of this space.

While I had anticipated finding a generational disconnect in Montreal's LGBTQ+ community, the reasons for it, the extent of it, and extreme impact of it were far beyond what I had anticipated. Across all of my interviews, one thing was clear: the generations are not talking to one another. There is no evident hate or prejudice, just a polite lack of interest. Older generations are aware that the younger generations are unfamiliar with community history. However, they neither seem to negatively judge them for this lack of awareness nor seem to feel a responsibility to actively tell their stories. Younger generations seem unaware of the depth of community history that exists around them. It has not occurred to them to ask questions of the older generations because they are not aware that these stories exist. We, younger generations, may have heard the dates of big LGBTQ+ milestones like Stonewall or the initial HIV/AIDS crisis, but have no frame of reference for these dates and have failed to connect these events to the people we meet and pass in The Village. The socio-political climate experienced by younger generations of LGBTQ+ people today is so *dramatically* different than the one experienced by LGBTQ+ people ten, twenty or thirty years before them. As a result, it appears to be almost inconceivable to younger generations that the oppressive socio-political climate and intense and aggressive prejudice experienced by the older generations is understood as something that happened 'a long time ago,' rather than to older generations who are still part of the community. This certainly skews younger generations of LGBTQ+ people's understanding of their own identity in relation to a broader LGBTQ+ community. This also impacts younger generations' understanding of The Village specifically. As discussed in Chapter 1, any place's identity can be understood as a mix of its past, present, and future (Massey 1995). If The Village's past is understood incorrectly, then any understanding of its present and future is certainly equally skewed.

Struggles of Respecting Queer Oral History Conventions and Knowledge Dissemination

Like many of the documentary filmmakers interviewed by Liz Miller in *Going Public*, I too saw the potential for my work to "strengthen connections between communities [and] audiences" (Miller et al 7). As I had discovered that the history of The Village is not actively being passed down between generations and seeing as I had unearthed some of this history, making this content accessible was a priority. I was particularly concerned with making my work easily accessible in both form and content for younger generations of Montreal's LGBTQ+

community. Like media artist jesikah maria ross, I believe that different, targeted audiences “require, or resonate with different forms [and] different aesthetics” (ross in Miller 8). As younger generations are accustomed to modern media with shorter cuts and points being made more quickly (Gausby 2015), I felt like I needed to edit in a similar style to make this content watchable for this demographic. However, the queer oral history conventions that guided my production process side towards longer cuts, allowing participants to tell the entirety of their stories in their own words. I was torn between respecting the principles of my methodology and creating a final product that would facilitate knowledge dissemination with my target audience. I believe that I found a balance between the two. By being very intentional, careful, and critical during editing, I believe that I managed to condense stories while still remaining true to participants’ original narratives.

I equally struggled with my authorial responsibility to include or exclude certain terminology. While Queer Oral History tradition mandates that interviewees’ specific use of terminology be retained (Halperin 1990), I felt that certain vocabulary that is considered problematic in the contemporary moment should not be included in new community media. I also felt that younger generations of LGBTQ+ people risked dismissing all of the stories of an elder if they strongly disagreed with a portion of their expressed political opinions or the use of certain vocabulary. There were few instances where this issue presented itself, however, it was a major contemplation of mine, so I feel worth including mention of it in my reflections. This issue equally leads to a fear of mine, that I may have unintentionally sugar-coated parts of the video or excluded certain topics to create a more pleasant and positive watching experience.

What Made the Final Cut

In this film, I had hoped to include the voices of those who have historically been marginalized in LGBTQ+ media- prioritizing the voices of women, non-binary people and people of colour. I especially did not want to give white, cis male voices too much space or authority. This was trickier than I had anticipated for two reasons. Firstly, since The Village has historically best catered to white men, white men in my interviews are the ones who knew the historical facts most clearly because they lived them directly. Secondly, the men I interviewed spoke with such confidence about ‘facts’ that their content felt more engaging when I watched it. This presented a dilemma for me. Do I go with the most engaging content in hopes of producing a more

interesting film or prioritize marginalized voices to provide a more balanced perspective? In the editing room, I chose to prioritize marginalized voices.

I often prioritized Dean's stories since he identified as a female lesbian when the stories happened. This, however, led to another challenge. Acknowledging Trans people as part of a vulnerable minority, in my proposal and ethics protocol, I identified a few strategies that I would use to protect their interests. One of them was to not intentionally draw attention to their transness, rather, to let it emerge through their stories if it organically occurred. However, situating Dean's identity felt very important, because it frames all of the stories of his activism from the perspective of a lesbian, a perspective that I wanted to incorporate in the film. Further, his current opinions offer a meaningful reflection on The Village from an individual who has experienced the place from multiple gender and sexual identities. Without creating a specific section in the film that dove into his identity, I had one opportunity to quasi-organically include mention of his gender identity. It came at the end of a somewhat long-winded story. I was including the beginning of the story, but I had to decide if I would include the longwinded end of the story simply to include him revealing his gender identity. I debated at length what would be the correct decision to make both as a storyteller and as a respectful and ethical researcher. I decided to include the longer clip. I believe that situating his voice as that of a former lesbian and current Trans person allows for a better understanding of his stories as well as visibly provides space for an often marginalized voice.

While this project examines how women have been excluded from spaces in The Village at length, it failed to include a more thorough examination of how this space has historically excluded other minorities. Especially how this space has actively excluded people of colour, especially black people. I conducted interviews with two female black participants from different generations- one in her late 40s who experienced extremely overt racism and exclusion in The Village, while the younger woman never felt excluded based on her race. Initially, these interviews were excluded along with all of the interviews from the first round of filming. As I incorporated interviews from the first round of filming into the documentary, neither of these interviews were included as their content largely did not align with the newly paired-back range of locations visited and topics covered. Furthermore, I was concerned that including these two interviews as a pair might suggest that racism is no longer a problem in The Village. However, I

am aware that perhaps my own racial bias and concerns about tokenizing these participants-might have resulted in this exclusion.

Since Queer Oral History traditions value letting participants tell their own stories in their own words, I had not planned to use a voice over in order to avoid overly determining their narratives. Though I did my best to include multiple perspectives and included participants' comments even when I did not agree with them, I realized that through the editing process, I was already inflecting the piece with my bias. As Bill Nichols explains, all documentary film is a balance between "respect for the historical world" and creative vision (Nichols 5). While documentary "refers to a historical reality," it always does so from a "distinct perspective"- in this case my perspective. Omitting a voice over in an attempt to remove myself from the documentary would have been pointless as the entire film is already constructed through my lens. Additionally, other work about documentary film suggests that in order for an audience to be able to critically engage with a film, it need to be somewhat reflexive by providing access to not only of the final product (the film) but also the producer and process (Fabian in Ruby 1988). My revealing myself, my motivations and elements of the production process through the voiceover, I would be providing viewers with the necessary information to better understand and engage with my film. Furthermore, when I showed friends and family portions of the film, I would often pause to casually add a comment or explain why I had done something. I realized that my viewers should be privy to these interesting tidbits as well, so I decided to add myself in as an additional perspective. The voice-over served four purposes: to add context to certain events being discussed, to highlight key points that were being made, to provide a break to viewers where conclusions are explicitly being drawn for them, as well as to meet me and explain why the film is being made. The addition of voiceover also helped me to connect the chapters in a much smoother way.

Intergenerational Dialogue Through Documentary Film

Through the editing process, I had hoped to create intergenerational dialogue; where people from different generations would talk about the same location or topic but with different understandings or opinions of it. This would serve to highlight parallels and disjunctures between generations. This would also serve to create the feeling of community storytelling towards which Queer Oral History strives. I believe that I succeeded in this through the use of shorter cuts.

Every historical event and location was described by multiple community members- completing each other's sentences or expanding upon each other's thoughts.

Additionally, unexpectedly, I believe that I created some semblance of intergenerational dialogue on site during the second round of interviews. The interviews themselves became a proxy for face-to-face intergenerational communication. While I had not anticipated the creation of this dialogue during my production process, Katerina Cizek, a documentary filmmaker, does so intentionally. Through "video bridging," showing videos of one group of her subjects to the other, Cizek attempts to create mutual understanding between her subjects without them ever meeting (Miller 2010, Silversides 2007). While I did not show my participants videos of one another, my role during interviews evolved from being an interviewer to being an interviewer and storyteller. Having conducted 14 interviews and both observed The Village and heard the stories of a slew of my contacts during my two year break from production, I had a wealth of stories and knowledge about the area. I felt confident in my understanding of the historical facts, my impressions, and my understanding of how people from different generations understood the space. This allowed me to both listen and share the stories of other participants as well as historical facts with my participants during interviews. As a result, these interviews were closer to group discussion with several exchanges between myself and participants concerning each topic rather than formal interviews where questions are asked and answered. These interviews flowed much more naturally and felt like a communal effort as participants did more than just answer questions, they pondered and responded to the information I was giving them.

Additionally, during the interviews, participants from older generations often guessed how the younger generations felt or experienced certain things. During my early interviews all I could say was "I don't know." In these later ones, I could tell them what the younger generations had told me. This usually resulted in me telling older participants that the younger ones had told me the same thing as they had or felt the same way as they did about a topic. My participants seemed surprised at these parallels; I began to wonder if there was less of a gap between generations than I had imagined when I began this project. Being able to share more information with the younger generations during my second round of interviews resulted in richer interviews and a more rewarding experience for the interviewees. After younger generations concluded their thoughts about a particular location or topic, I shared with them the history of these locations/topics and the thoughts of those from older generations. They often responded with

surprise and additional thoughts. Over the course of the interviews, participants became more engaged with the space and grew more critical and thoughtful with their comments; actively considering the role of community, history, identity, and representation without being prompted. While participants began interviews discussing The Village in a more passive way, as they learned the history of the space and recognized how they fit into a broader LGBTQ+ community with a recent violent history, they seemed more invested in the space and became more passionate, almost argumentative in their discussion of the ongoing importance of The Village.

At the end of these interviews, most of the participants expressed gratitude for having been part of this experience- saying that they learned a lot and felt more connected to the space as a result. While I had hoped that my final product, *Entre Papineau et St-Hubert*, would function in this way, I had not anticipated that the interviews themselves would produce a similar result. Having interviewees respond in this manner gives me hope that younger viewers might respond to the video in a similar fashion; that by being more aware of local LGBTQ+ history they would feel more curious about, connected to, and invested in the community.

Reflections On My Research Questions

Is The Village still relevant as a site of community formation and does the neighbourhood retain any cultural significance for Montreal's LGBTQ community? Do different generations of LGBTQ people relate to The Village differently since they have experienced the neighbourhood in such different socio-political climates? How is the unique history of this neighbourhood passed on?

How can I use a documentary film format to put different generations into conversation?

Through the undertaking of an oral history project in the form of a documentary film, I sought to answer the questions above. In every single one of my interviews, regardless of age or any other demographic, participants suggested that spending time in The Village played a fundamental role in their acceptance of their sexual identity. Some participants suggested that without The Village or another distinct queer space they would likely be in heterosexual marriages (though possibly having non-heterosexual affairs). Even Mariya, the youngest participant, explained that having a distinct LGBTQ+ area that is formally recognized and supported by the government helped validate her sexual identity; without The Village accepting her identity would have been much more difficult (Dragonas 2019).

It is clear that Montreal's Gay Village in its current form (the types of business present and how they function) is not attractive for Montreal's current LGBTQ+ community. Everyone I spoke with expressed a desire to spend more time in The Village. However, they explained that they were not because the neighbourhood does not currently have spaces in which they feel comfortable and enjoy spending time. Most of the people I interviewed expressed a desire to feel connected to LGBTQ+ community but with so many businesses closed in The Village and few other easily accessible LGBTQ+ their desire for community is going unmet.

Individuals of all ages continue to visit The Village for the same reasons that people visited the space in its very beginnings: for individual identity formation, community building, as a site to find peers and potential romantic partners, and for safety from sexual-orientation based discrimination. However, while The Village retains cultural significance for Montreal's LGBTQ community, it is clear that it is not currently functioning as a relevant site of community formation for all of Montreal's LGBTQ+ community.

Conclusion – It's Time to Talk

This summer, I walked up and down Sainte-Catherine Street in The Village countless blurry times. I walked with friends I see all the time, friends I hadn't seen in forever, new friends, awkward dates, and even a random stranger who let me play with his dog. No matter whom I was with, I couldn't help myself from constantly stopping them to share an interesting tidbit about this old bar and that old building. Everyone I spoke with was interested, curious, and often surprised by the information I was sharing with them.

Though this project relied on Queer Oral History methodology, I had not anticipated to what extent my final product would rely on key events in history. I knew that to understand a place's present you had to explore its past, however I had no idea how deep, rich, and significant The Village's past had been. I thought the history of The Village would be a simple introduction to the piece, not its primary content. Throughout my interviews, I was repeatedly shocked by the stories and histories I was hearing and kept finding myself whispering to my assistant: "I didn't know...omg that's so important."

Parc de l'Espoir, in particular, stands out. Frankly, I was overwhelmed and ashamed at my lack of awareness of this symbolic space. Learning about this park is likely what shifted this film from being a more balanced conversation between generations into a history. Parc de L'Espoir is an open-air square located on the corner of Rue Panet and Sainte-Catherine Street. It is located immediately beside my old haunt, Bar Le Drugstore. I walked by this park hundreds if not thousands of times. I've often parked immediately beside this park. I've made fun of this park. My friends and I always thought it was just a place where men sat around and tried to pick each other up. We thought of the space as being creepy and weird. I have been to the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, which has very similar tomb-like benches. Yet, it never once occurred to me to make the connection, or even look at the park long enough to ask why it was there or question its significance. The first time one of my participants asked to meet there, I had to Google it...and I thought it was a different park further down the street.

My lack of awareness of this significant space (and the lack of awareness of everyone single one of my LGBTQ+ contacts under 35 that I asked about it) and, by extension, my failure to consider the actual and ongoing impact of the initial outburst of AIDS in MY community,

exemplifies how much of a generational disconnect there is in Montreal's LGBTQ+ community and how alienated we are from our own history.

Possibly starting in CEGEP, but certainly from the beginning of my undergraduate studies at Concordia, I have eagerly sought out classes that discussed queer theory, sexuality, and gender. The topic of most of my work and papers related to LGBTQ+ culture, community, identity, or media in some way. Yet, when presented with the opportunity to take one of Concordia's very easily accessible online course about HIV/AIDS, I thought it didn't have anything to do with my interests. Though I knew the onset of AIDS was tied to MY community, I believed that it had happened so long ago that it wasn't particularly relevant anymore. I could not make the connection between these dates on paper and MY community. I had never considered that some of the people sitting next to me in bars lived through these events or that those "creepy" men sitting in the park had lost friends, many many many friends to AIDS. Also, I never could have imagined that there were police raids of gay bars in Montreal or that The Village was actively pushed to its current location due to a series of these raids.

I wonder why, until now, I felt so disconnected from my community's history and why most of my LGBTQ+ friends seem to be just as unaware? I believe that, for many of us, growing in families that aren't part of the LGBTQ+ community plays a significant role in this disconnect. The little history that we are exposed to is depersonalized- we don't have faces or a frame of reference with which to tie these events. It isn't our mom or our grandma who experienced a raid- it is just 'some' person. We aren't hearing these stories over family dinner- if we are hearing these stories at all it is usually in a classroom or through a quick scroll past a Facebook post. How, then, do we awaken a curiosity for our histories? How do we foster an environment to encourage the telling of our history? How do we make that history relatable?

Since beginning this project, I have begun to see more history-focused media emerge from Montreal's LGBTQ community. I hope that this trend continues. I believe that capturing and disseminating our history in a relatable way on an ongoing basis is pivotal for our community's ongoing understanding of itself as the socio-political climate surrounding this minority continues to quickly evolve. Since grandma doesn't seem to be telling these stories at Sunday dinner, I believe that it is all of our community's responsibility to be telling these stories. I hope that *Entre Papineau et St-Hubert* plays a small role in this telling.

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Appendix

Question list:

- 1-Do you remember hearing about The Village for the first time? What did you expect?
- 2- Tell me about the first time you came to The Village. How old were you? Who did you come with?
- 3- How often did you used to come here? How often do you come now here?
- 4- Why do you spend time here? What do you do when you come here? Who do you usually come with?
- 5- Tell me about any unwritten rules.
- 6- Do you ever go to queer events outside of The Village? Are they different from events in The Village?
- 7- How would you feel if The Village didn't exist or if it closed?