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The Digital Storyteller's Stage: Queer Everyday Activists Negotiating Privacy and Publicness

Sonja Vivienne and Jean Burgess

This article explores how queer digital storytellers understand and mobilize concepts of privacy and publicness as they engage in everyday activism through creating and sharing personal stories designed to contribute to cultural and political debates. Through the pre-production, production, and distribution phases of digital storytelling workshops and participation in a related online community, these storytellers actively negotiate the tensions and continuua among visibility and hiddenness; secrecy and pride; finite and fluid renditions of self; and individual and collective constructions of identity. We argue that the social change they aspire to is at least partially achieved through ''networked identity work'' on and offline with both intimate and imagined publics.

While the term ''digital storytelling'' has been applied to a wide variety of digitally mediated narrative practices, from 1990s hypertext fiction to transmedia storytelling to the lifestreaming associated with social media, here it refers to the production of short (2–5 minute) autobiographical videos (digital stories), mostly created from photos and artwork and voiced by the storyteller, in some kind of facilitated workshop environment (Burgess, 2006). Drawing on a substantial body of empirical data gathered during three digital storytelling workshops and ongoing participation in the Rainbow Family Tree digital storytelling community Web site, we outline how queer storytellers balance privacy with the desire to have a voice and to be heard in public debates. This sharing of personal stories in public spaces in pursuit of social change is an example of ''everyday activism'' (Vivienne, 2011a; 2011b). Queer people are

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accustomed to undertaking daily grass roots activism of the type recounted by a lesbian mother of twin 6-year old boys: When the sales assistant at a hardware store joked ''Hope Dad's going to help you with these heavy bags when you get home!'' the boys responded ''We don't have a dad!''. The sales person was clearly embarrassed and the mother felt the need to clarify, somewhat archly, ''They have two mums ... but we're both quite strong!''.

As Gross points out, ''Queer folk are past masters at this [performativity] game ... most of us survived society's sexual boot camp—high school—either by masquerading and passing, or living on the margins'' (Gross, 2007). While there are homologies between the ways our queer participants create and share their digital stories of self and the ways they perform identity in everyday life, digital tools remediate our stories and performances of identity (Gray, 2009). For storytellers, they present distinctive possibilities and challenges, including those associated with widespread distribution to unknown audiences. As activists these storytellers wish to catalyze social change by challenging popular stereotypes, rather than simply consolidate their values and affirm their identities among like minded people, thereby amplifying an already complex set of risks around self-disclosure. Expanding on Goffman's (1959) stage metaphor we explore how storytellers present themselves simultaneously to disparate back and front stage audiences and manage the enduring and searchable aspects of digital identity artifacts. In so doing, our participants engage in ''networked identity work'' which combines elements of networked publics (boyd, 2011) and identity work (Goffman, 1959) as they negotiate how they present themselves to and with intimate and unknown publics.

The Rainbow Family Tree Case Study

The digital storytellers who are the focus of this article are all members of a small online community, Rainbow Family Tree. To date the Web site (rainbowfamilytree.com) has 156 members made up of queer digital storytellers and their friends and family members. It currently hosts 35 digital stories. Rainbow Family Tree members identify in a variety of ways often summarized as GLBTQIS (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Same Sex Attracted).[1] For the purposes of this article, ''queer'' is used as an inclusive term that is also intended to reflect difficult to categorize identities that transgress, move between, or cut across socially constructed boundaries of sex and gender. The Rainbow Family Tree Web site is a customized white label social network platform[2] and initially served as an interface for an online digital storytelling workshop facilitated by Vivienne and auspiced by SHine South Australia.[3] While many digital storytelling workshops promote the opportunity to gain technical skills, few extend this opportunity beyond the end of the workshop (for a global survey see Hartley & McWilliam, 2009). A traditional three or four day face to face workshop finishes with a screening for participants and invited guests with little consideration of other distribution possibilities. The Rainbow Family Tree was borne out of consideration

of these lost opportunities and the new opportunities afforded by online social media platforms.

Since its genesis in 2009, the Rainbow Family Tree site has evolved to become a repository for additional digital stories, some created by community members at home and others created in a second initiative auspiced by the AIDS Council of South Australia. Most members of the Rainbow Family Tree site participate by watching the digital stories, posting comments and sharing their own experiences of everyday activism. While some use ''like'' buttons to share the stories with their Facebook, Twitter, or email networks, others have screened their stories to parliamentary enquiries into pertinent issues like same sex relationship recognition. Most storytellers on Rainbow Family Tree have had their stories included in DVD compilations intended for education, training, and social services.

Ethics approval was awarded prior to the initial workshop and participants were given the option of participating in the over-arching research component as an adjunct to the workshops.[4] The data analyzed in this article are a synthesis of three case studies (two digital storytelling initiatives and the Rainbow Family Tree website) that include 24 storytellers, 11 facilitators and/or editors, and 33 digital stories. Vivienne, who also regards herself as a queer digital storyteller, engaged in observant participation[5] throughout the research, in a collaborative ethnographic mode (Alasuutari, 1995; Rappaport, 2008). Dominant themes were assembled as they emerged from interviews, online communications, storyteller statements,[6] textual analysis of the digital stories, and field notes accumulated over a two-and-a-half year period. Here we build on this work to produce a typology of approaches to privacy and publicness, drawing on material relating to the experiences of seven storytellers, four of which are treated in particular depth: a lesbian mother of twin toddlers; the parents of a transsexual child; a transsexual woman; and an HIV positive rural-dwelling healthcare professional.

Analysis

In the analysis that follows, we have developed a typology across the three temporal phases of digital storytelling: *pre-production* (where participants are recruited to or sign up to a workshop, and consider the parameters of their participation); *production* (the workshop, story circle, story composition, voice-over recording, and editing); and *distribution* (screening, exhibiting, and publishing). At each of the phases, the storytellers actively explore personal and cultural understandings of identity. They engage in negotiations with literally ''intimate'' publics (Berlant, 2008) populated by fellow workshop participants, facilitators, friends, family, and workmates. They come to decisions about what constitutes socially acceptable public revelations—what is best kept secret and concealed and what should be made visible and celebrated with pride. In many cases these negotiations appear to be heightened by queerness and the social taboos that surround any explicit

expression of sex, gender, or sexuality. In their consideration of the imagined or unknown publics they are addressing they reflect upon their differences and similarities. This ''speaking across difference,'' or ''expressing, questioning and challenging differently situated knowledge'' (Young, 1997, pp. 68–69) encourages reflection upon what narrative and rhetorical conventions might be most persuasive.

Weaving in and out of these three phases, we offer detailed examples of three textual approaches to identity construction: *visibility, bounded representation*, and *pseudonymity*. These approaches further intersect with three tactical modes of content sharing during the distribution phase: *targeted sharing*, *ad hoc sharing*, and *proxy sharing*. Our discussion of these choices is organized under headings relating to key questions that the storytellers need to negotiate in planning, making, and sharing their work: questions around self-representation (Identity in a Networked Context); rhetorical approaches to difference (Speaking across Difference); the problem of consistency (Getting my Story Straight); complex exhibitions of selfhood (Curating my Exhibition); and self-promotion (Marketing Myself).

Pre-production: Identity in a Networked Context

When people first receive an email or a phone call inviting them to become involved in a digital storytelling workshop[7] they frequently respond with remarks like, ''But I don't have any stories to tell!'' or, ''Nobody will be interested in what I have to say ...'' By early in the workshop process these concerns frequently unfold into questions like ''Which story shall I tell?''; ''What will people (or person X) think?''; and ''How do I speak for my community?'' The pre-production phase is the start of networked identity work in which storytellers consider how they fit in their social worlds. They find and refine an individual narrative voice with feedback and affirmation from a collective. In the case of 17-year-old out-at-school Max, pre-production included asking permission to include photos of the grandparents who raised him in a story he hoped would be a ''tribute to my supportive family.'' His grandfather responded with: ''I don't mind you being gay but I don't want you to shout from the rooftops about it!'' and refused permission. Many storytellers recounted similar discoveries of discordance among their networks about socially sanctioned representations of self (and, by implication, representations of the network itself). Further, to participate in workshops, storytellers generally form some kind of an affiliation either with publicly stated workshop criteria[8] or collectively defined activist goals. Their motivations are various but many report feeling a duty to communicate to and for other people who may be undergoing similar trials and triumphs, sometimes reporting a desire to ''change the world.'' Regardless of motivation, this first pre-production identification process invariably charts a growing awareness that the personal stories being told are worthy of taking up public space, and indeed that the speaker is a worthwhile representative.

Production: Speaking across Difference

Story production entails further negotiations between social worlds as the storytellers position themselves within, in relation to, or against various kinds of publics. Critiques of Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere highlight the exclusion of women, the working classes, and a host of minority groups who lack the cultural capital to participate (Warner, 2005; Wolfe, 1997; Young, 1997), proposing a number of alternative conceptualizations, including recent work reflecting on the emerging dynamics of online participation such as Papacharissi's (2010) notion of the networked ''private sphere.'' Of particular relevance to queer everyday activism, Warner's idea of the counterpublic proposes a conceptual space in which marginalized people may constitute themselves as a smaller public, differentiated from and in opposition to the world at large. In a similar vein, Berlant (2008) proposes the concept of an intimate public, which she characterizes as sharing ''a worldview and emotional knowledge that have derived from a broadly common historical experience'' (p. viii). The storytellers represented in this article do, to a large extent, address audiences that share attributes of both intimate publics and counterpublics but, as activists they commonly articulate a wish to catalyze social change rather than simply consolidate their values and affirm their identities among like-minded people. They wish to impact unknown, imagined, even antipathetic publics as well.

Molly, a lesbian mother of toddler twins, made a story entitled ''Where did we come from?'' which explores unconventional reproduction and family structure. Addressed specifically to her children and with accompanying nursery rhyme soundtrack, she hoped the story would also serve as a discussion starter for future childcare workers and teachers. She also screened and sent the story to various members of the Queensland State Parliament who were considering a bill to recognize non-biological same sex parents. Her story starts and finishes with the name of the campaign—*Love makes a family: Vote to recognise our families in '09*—that also offers it context. In trying to address divergent audiences with the same story Molly struggled with tone—both the tone of the story and the tenor of her voice—and was concerned that both might be too ''saccharine'' to achieve her political goals. While the law reform she hoped for was eventually achieved, Molly speaks of what is perhaps a more significant realization:

> One thing I learnt was that even though, for political purposes, we like to present ourselves as ''just like any other families,'' it is really clear how deeply radical queer families are. It is no wonder conservative people get so concerned about us. We are reshaping society. Our children are learning about embracing difference. . . . (Molly, storyteller statement, 2009)

In addressing multiple audiences Molly makes a space for her and her family among them. Her children have acquired a story of belonging with which they have become so familiar, that at one stage they were requesting nightly re-tellings. Their teachers and childcare workers are offered a language (e.g., two mummies, Uncle Harry, IVF) they can use to relate to the family, demonstrating acceptance. Politicians and

policy makers are offered insight into the daily lived reality of same sex family life rather than a theoretical possibility. ''Speaking across difference''[9] enables Molly to consolidate connections with both intimate and unknown publics.

While Molly elected an approach of complete *visibility*, other storytellers undertake a selective disclosure of identity that we call *bounded representation*. Storytellers who are accustomed to managing their identities for multiple audiences do so not by considering every disparate group among their prospective audience but by considering two groups among them—''those for whom we seek to present an idealized front and those who may find this front problematic'' (Hogan, 2010, p. 383). ''Bounded'' here refers to the careful containment of identifying information, taking into consideration the ''lowest common denominator''—that is, the lowest threshold of sensitivity or negative response—among imagined audiences. Greg made ''Me, Mum and Dad'' as a reverent tribute to his parents who volunteered throughout the AIDS crisis of the mid-1980s. He had originally included a montage of other family members whom he wanted to thank for being supportive. However he was concerned that his young nieces and nephews might experience what he called ''retribution'':

> School yard kid sees his other school mate by chance in something that his Mum and Dad are looking at on YouTube. And suddenly he's marked as—his Uncle's a faggot; his Uncle's got AIDS; his Uncle.... (Greg, interview, 2011)

After lengthy reflection Greg decided to substitute these family album photos, endearing as they were, with images he had taken of flowers in his garden.

In addressing audiences that are both familiar and unknown (in some cases antipathetic) storytellers deal with the collapsed contexts of digitally mediated social convergence which ''requires people to handle disparate audiences simultaneously without a social script'' (boyd, 2008, p. 18). Storytellers like Molly and Greg handle the disparate audiences by coding their narratives with layers that take into account what meaning might be made of them. Molly chooses a tone that is appealing to children in the hope that adult audiences be alerted to the irreproachability of children caught in the midst of moral disputes over family structure. Greg chooses home-grown flowers, recognizable to family members, in order to represent their love without identifying them. However, it is not just disparate audiences that prove problematic for our storytellers, but the question of how to represent and future-proof complex identities that change over time.

Getting my Story Straight

Storytellers who have journeyed across firmly staked out poles of identity (including transitions across gender norms, transitions from able-bodied to disabled, from party-animal to poor health, and so on) must reflect upon contrasts between current and previous articulations of self as well as considering with which versions of the story intimate audiences might be familiar. While this identity exploration

sometimes includes a critical examination of socially constructed versus biologically determined conceptions of identity most storytellers do this without too much reflection of how creating a story might crystallize an isolated and finite rendition of self. Further, many storytellers ascribe to popular notions of inner truth and believe they are more credible if they represent the same self to all publics, summarized by one storyteller as, ''Honesty is the best policy'' (Brian, e-mail correspondence, 2012).

As Giddens (1991) points out, our biographies are always being rewritten:

> The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual ''supplies'' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor—important though this is—in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. . . . It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ''story'' about the self. (p. 54)

But digital stories are fundamentally static entities. A life's complexity must be distilled into approximately 3 minutes that can only ever capture the journey so far. The following example helps illuminate the problematic issue of fluid, evolving identity and the difficulty of foreshadowing further change in a permanent digital artifact.

Karen made ''Sisterhood'' as a tribute to her sister, the only family member who stood by her throughout the early days of her male-to-female gender transition. In an interview with Karen over a year later she revealed that ''Karen's days are numbered.'' For a number of complex reasons, Karen decided to become male again. While Karen frequently used words like ''success'' and ''failure'' to describe this journey she was also keen to state that any new incarnation of identity would reflect aspects of all previous selves.

> I believe that it's a little bit like a history record . . . it comes from the perspective of the writer . . . you ask different people about that history and they'll see it differently but it was true to the writer . . . Also, that story didn't finish at that point, in fact that was the beginning of a journey in many ways . . . But it doesn't diminish the truth of that story and the experience at that time . . . (Karen, interview, 2011)

Here Karen offers her personal insight into the transient nature of identity (few of us would choose to remain consistent with our teenage representations of self), and the unexpected paths that all our lives take. She also highlights the arbitrary nature of choosing any one point as the beginning, middle, or end of a digital story. While at the time of interview she felt that she ''couldn't see the wood for the trees,'' she thought it possible that at some point in the future she might undertake an update to her story, perhaps in the form of a new digital story, or as a Rainbow Family Tree blog entry or other online post—a possibility afforded by developments in digital media (self-publishing via blogging platforms, linking different representations of self across different platforms, and the lifestreaming capabilities of social media) that were not broadly available in the early years of the digital storytelling movement (Lambert, 2009).

Curating My Exhibition

Hogan's (2010) discussion of self-censoring practices takes place in a context where the role of ''curator'' is played by digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter. While this curation by a digital third party is clearly pertinent to the storytellers in our case study we wish to consider the possibility of storytellers curating their own self-representations, firstly (during the production phase) through careful construction of digital story texts and secondly (during the distribution phase) through strategic sharing of content and consideration of the contexts in which their exhibitions of self are screened. Curated self-representation is apparent in the bounded representation undertaken by Greg and heightened in the case of storytellers who perceive themselves at risk of direct discrimination and prejudice at personal and institutional levels. These storytellers are without everyday activist opportunities in a face to face context (as they don't feel safe outing themselves to unknown publics) but are often highly motivated by marginalization. Digital storytelling offers the possibility of de-identifying their stories to make them at least partially anonymous. While they remain aware that specific friends and family members (intimate publics) would be able to recognize their stories they are nevertheless able to maintain pseudonymity in order to speak to an imagined unknown public. The following example illustrates a pseudonymous textual approach to the identity construction of a transsexual child by her parents.

Molly and Brendon (pseudonyms chosen by the storytellers) describe their journey as parents: from the birth of their baby boy and the gradual growth of her girl identity. In making ''Blue for Boys? Pink for Girls?'' they were aware that their daughter, upon arriving at adulthood as a legally affirmed woman, might not wish to acknowledge her transsexual origins. Molly and Brendon initially used baby photos, or over-the-shoulder or wide shots, but after advice from their family lawyer they decided to blur all images of the child. They were told of a similar American legal case in which a mother was sued by a divorced former-spouse for exposing the child to the risk of publically being identified as transsexual. They had also heard of Family Court Judges (who are responsible for approving the hormone interventions that may be required as the child approaches adolescence) criticizing parents who failed to adequately consider the child's best interest by publicly acknowledging their child's ''predicament.'' Molly and Brendon wished to make a story to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and transsexualism but they were also aware that this story would have both persistent and searchable dimensions (boyd, 2011):

> At risk of exposing our daughter's identity and taking away her right to privacy we decided to conceal pictures and any possible connection to her. This became a technical and creative challenge in our storytelling process that in a way prevented us from truly celebrating our daughter, free from shame and secrecy. (Molly and Brendon, storyteller statement, 2011)

Molly carefully chose photos that expressed the child's joyful experiments in gender performance rather than featuring angst-ridden close ups, although her narration

makes it clear that the child's exploration was not an easy ride: ''We heard you pray, asking the angels to turn you into a girl ... but we kept on telling you that you were a boy. We were wrong ... we just didn't understand ...'' Molly was also concerned that her voice might be recognizable and organized to have the narration re-recorded by a family friend. The process triggered many family discussions about the nuances of privacy and secrecy. In a later interview Molly spoke about her struggles with what she perceived to be a social conflation of pride and visibility, and corresponding secrecy and shame. On these particular affective dynamics Warner (2005) points out that:

> ... common mythology understands the closet as an individual's lie about himself or herself. We blame people for being closeted. But the closet is ... produced by the heteronormative assumptions of everyday talk.... In such a regime of sexual domination, publicness will feel like exposure, and privacy will feel like the closet. The closet may seem to be a kind of protection. Indeed, the feeling of protection is one of the hallmarks of modern privacy. But in fact the closet is riddled with fear and shame. (p. 52)

Warner's analysis of the closet is pertinent to the complex politics of the categories of ''public'' and ''private'' among a variety of marginalized or invisible communities. Being open about one's personal life in public is high risk if one's identity is perceived as being not ''normal'' and therefore not socially sanctioned. However our storytellers do not necessarily equate being public or publicness (permitting strangers an insight into one's personal life and beliefs) with publicity (whereby one might actively seek exposure). Being private (understood by some as holding something back, or being coy, or possibly even ashamed) is by no means the same as privacy (understood by some as safety or possibly an abstract but inviolable human right). Of course, simplistic oppositions between the public and the private have been robustly challenged already (see for example Lange, 2008; Nissenbaum, 2010; Weintraub & Kumar, 1997). Weintraub (1997), for example, argues that, while the dichotomy of public/private offers a useful mechanism for analysis of our social universe, these categories are nevertheless complicated by:

> ... (at least) two fundamental, and analytically quite distinct, kinds of imagery in terms of which ''private'' can be contrasted with ''public'':
>
> 1. What is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed, or accessible.
> 2. What is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity of individuals. (p. 4–5)

In some examples from our case study ''private'' is spoken of as personal, intimate insights and shared out of what storytellers hope is in the ''public'' interest. Again, pseudonymity facilitates this sharing in the following example.

In ''My Secret Story'' Frank (a pseudonym) tells of the Catholic origins of his deeply internalized homophobia. His description of a drunken encounter with his ex resonates with many audience members; only the consequences for Frank were

exceptionally dramatic—he became HIV positive. The revelations Frank makes, being both sexually explicit and critiquing personal and dark mental states, would be construed by most as private. Conversely he uses creative and pragmatic strategies to maintain privacy so that he can share his story publicly. Photographs are creatively obscured with a black box titled ''Me'' and combinations of zooms and filters and fragments of photos represent disturbed mental states. There are no revealing thank-you's in the credits and even the personal copyright attribution was omitted.

> I live in the countryside and while open about being gay, I keep my HIV status to myself. I was torn between using personal photos or representative images, being out and proud of where I am now, but not wanting to risk being labelled by a disease and ultimately a mistake. So when I somewhat de identified the film I initially felt weak yet relieved. (Frank, storyteller statement, 2011)

While Frank had also done his time as an HIV activist working in the health sector in the city, he didn't wish his new country neighbors to stereotype him or treat him differently. Even though they know he is gay he describes the social stigma still attached to HIV and the accompanying internalized fears: ''so you go to the pub and have a sip from your schooner [beer glass] and you wonder whether they'll be looking at your schooner going 'how do they wash that schooner?' ... everything becomes much more slow motion ...'' (Frank, interview, 2011). He also describes how this reserve ''becomes a barrier to forming really close friendships'' because, when people share vulnerable and profound things, they generally need to talk about it with someone else and ''ultimately things get around ... so it's just easier to keep it to myself....'' While Frank is not quite sure how exactly his story will change the world he nevertheless feels empowered by the process: ''It's quite definitive ... there's all that history which is now a short, sharp, sweet story.... It *is* a starting place [for opening conversations about the many complex issues raised] ... but in a way it actually wraps it up ... there's no need to say anything else.'' Frank also felt the story was a contribution to society; he was doing his bit to help other young gay Christians accept themselves. The fact that Frank is able to share his intensely personal story in public is the result of digital self-representation and mediated distribution. In this way digitally mediated everyday activism transfigures both privacy and shame and facilitates a form of social engagement that is otherwise deeply problematic for many stigmatized and marginalized people.

Distribution: Marketing Myself

Alongside considerations of what to include and what to leave out of their narratives most storytellers also spend time considering how, when, and where they're going to share their story with audiences. While the peculiarly Australian ''tall-poppy syndrome'' (characterized by a reluctance to be seen as remarkable) was an issue that emerged in many interviews, some storytellers were reassured by the collective context in which their individual story travels. These contexts include

screenings at which the storytellers are present (a theatrical launch; showing the Web site to a friend) and many other unknown contexts physically distanced from the storyteller (screening of a compilation DVD in a workshop; online viewings by strangers).

In practice, storytellers choose among three modes of distribution: *targeted, proxy*, and *ad hoc*. Targeted stories (like Molly's campaign for law reform) are produced and distributed for a specific purpose and with at least one particular audience in mind. It is worth noting that, while several storytellers spoke about not wanting to preach to the converted, none, to our knowledge, actively sought out antagonistic audiences. Regardless of which mode of distribution they elected, when they considered who might be part of an unknown audience they imagined speaking to open-minded but ignorant audiences who may become more active supporters through "having their eyes opened."

In several cases storytellers undertook a *proxy* approach to sharing whereby their carefully crafted stories stand in for face-to-face discussions with their target audiences. Advocates, or proxies, may distribute these stories widely as long as their origins are not traceable. Both Frank, and Molly and Brendon, have active profiles on Rainbow Family Tree (one under a pseudonym) but the profiles are not linked to their stories. In both cases the storytellers track their stories progress in the world (through reading comments and/or following viewer statistics) but do not promote them personally to audiences using their real names. If they wish they are able to engage in activism by pseudonymously sharing their stories with interest groups (especially Web-based lobby groups, many of which can be located on Facebook) and encouraging viral circulation by community members.

For storytellers who elect to use both pseudonymity and proxy distribution, attending a physical screening of their own stories (especially in a small community in a small city) is fraught with personal risk. Frank, the pseudonymous author of "My Secret Story" attended the launch of the "Positive Stories" compilation during the Feast Festival (Adelaide's annual queer cultural festival). While his workshop peers sat on stage for a post-screening community forum, Frank sat among the audience. During the celebratory drinks and nibbles that followed he was witness to both praise and critiques of his story without ever really knowing whether anyone recognized him. This blend of intimate publics and unknown audiences in one locale is similar to the social convergence increasingly associated with online social networks and conversely, for storytellers who have taken a pseudonymous approach to self-representation, online sharing appears less complicated than face to face.

As storytellers' online digital literacy increases, their decisions regarding distribution change. While few of our storytellers regarded themselves as net savvy in the first instance, they nevertheless take the terms and conditions of potential Web distribution platforms very seriously. Offered the opportunity to set up profiles and share their videos on Rainbow Family Tree, Vimeo, Facebook, or YouTube, most elected to use the former two platforms because they offer a range of privacy settings controlling who can view, share, comment on, or download content and the option to elect various creative commons licenses. While many storytellers were

attracted by the lure of larger audiences on YouTube, few were willing to sign up to terms and conditions that require licensing content to YouTube for potential re-use by unknown third parties. Most storytellers chose not to permit even the smallest possibility of anyone (including mainstream media) using their words or images for homophobic purposes. While some storytellers were vaguely concerned that the re-purposing of their content was a technical possibility regardless of which distribution platform they chose, a pseudonymous or bounded approach to the textual production of this content allowed them to feel reassured. Addressing a lowest common denominator enables those storytellers who wish to widely distribute their stories (and those of their workshop peers) to post links with an accompanying call to action—''please share this''—in the hope that the stories would be circulated virally and have a ''drop in the ocean'' social-change effect.

As well as the technical parameters of any given platform, the perceived safety of a space also figured. The Rainbow Family Tree, for example, is curated around stories of queer identity for community members and visitors who are presumed to be sympathetic. Few storytellers share their stories on their personal Facebook profiles because, while they understand the concept of selective sharing to specific friends lists, not many people were confident about setting these up and several mentioned that they ''didn't trust Facebook to change it all again.'' Regardless, many were happy to support their fellow storytellers by sharing their stories via the Facebook ''like'' button that appears under stories on the Rainbow Family Tree site. Some were also happy to share their own story as a link on the Facebook groups or pages associated with particular interest or lobby groups they follow. This appears to be a workaround that enables sharing with like-minded strangers rather than a flatly undifferentiated list of Facebook ''friends'' with potentially incompatible political beliefs and social values.

Discussion

From our analysis of differing conceptual and textual approaches to identity construction, and varying distribution strategies, four common themes emerge, all in some way related to the over-arching concept of networked identity work. While these are by no means universal truths they synthesize our analysis of the particular understandings and beliefs expressed by a majority of the storyteller participants in our case studies.

1. *Digital tools afford greater control over self-representation*
   Gated access to big media (both audio-visual and print) has previously made it difficult for marginalized people to share their stories with unknown publics. Greater access to the digital tools for production and distribution has changed this. However, as illustrated particularly in the pre-production phase of digital storytelling, universal access and agency is inhibited by lack of cultural capital and social disincentives to self-exposure.

2. *Digital identity construction offers potential to speak across difference*
   Unlike face-to-face performances of identity, digital stories offer the opportunity for a refined, reflective articulation of self. Through the construction of verbal narratives and the curation of material or digital artifacts, storytellers are able to make meaning out of an apparently random assemblage of life events and, while this capacity to summarize generally elides complexity, it also draws attention to nuanced human similarities that evoke empathy and speak across difference. The digital contexts in which the stories travel are non-linear, interlinked, and evolving and, as storytellers acquire greater digital literacy, they develop the capacity to curate their stories in these contexts as exhibitions of selfhood, regaining space in which to represent complexity and fluidity. Storytellers become more aware of the constructed nature of identity and, far from feeling that this limits their free will, they feel empowered to shape their own future stories of self in collaboration with or in relation to others.
3. *Networked identity work transfigures privacy*
   Digital stories are crafted in an imagined relationship to, or even explicit collaboration with, intimate publics. These negotiations consolidate the storytellers' place within these select publics and among a wider imagined public. Deliberations over privacy, safety, publicity, risk, secrets and shame increase an awareness of these concepts as social constructs that mean different things to different people. Choosing what position to take in relationship to these constructs, for example sharing an intensely personal story with disparate publics via bounded representation, affords an unprecedented degree of empowerment for marginalized storytellers—empowerment that transfigures privacy and counters shame. Further, public expression of marginalized voices opens space for others to speak as, they too, negotiate how and where they fit in the world.
4. *Small affirmations can parlay into empowerment and social change*
   The storytellers in our case studies report that their sense of belonging as respectable citizens of the world is not necessarily correlated to whether they are heard by, or visible to, powerful people. In workshops and interviews, storytellers frequently speak about uncovering the support of friends and family members (and in some cases strangers) as an unexpected benefit of the digital storytelling process. Participants also identified a common revelation that the negotiation of new understandings with intimate circles of friends and family is an underestimated but important micro element of macro social change. In some cases storytellers explicitly articulate their hopes and dreams, often in the closing words of their story. In imagining the future worlds they would like to be part of they make these worlds possible, a prospect they seed in the imaginations of their audiences. Through networked identity work storytellers frequently arrive at new understandings of both individual and collective constructions of identity and in doing so they consolidate their connections with the world, something they frequently refer to as becoming ''empowered'' or feeling ''affirmed.''

In summary, through the three phases of digital storytelling, queer storytellers engage at various levels of intensity with particular social practices related to networked identity. They may:

1. Negotiate their position inside of or in relation to intimate publics and unknown or imagined publics;
2. Articulate who they are, how they've changed or grown, or how they will continue to change across a personal timeline and in relation to the other people in their lives;
3. Recognize and enact the possibility of active meaning-making in self-representation; and
4. Accept affirmation and reciprocate, giving affirmation that creates space for others to speak.

Through the creative use of digital tools, textual devices, and both on and offline communication strategies, these storytellers literally and explicitly make themselves up in a pre-meditated form and in a social context that is markedly set apart from the spontaneous performances of identity in everyday life. While this labor is undertaken amidst significant personal and technical challenges, this conscious networked identity work nevertheless facilitates social engagement and stakes out a new territory in participatory culture for even the most socially at-risk identities.

Notes

[1]Other nominalizations used by participants include: Transsexual, Ally, Queerspawn, Parent, Polyamorous, Pansexual, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Disabled, Differently-Abled, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Feminist, Femme, Butch, and many other descriptive and summary labels.

[2]ning.com offers a customizable Web interface with various features available for fees currently ranging from A$30–A$600 per year. Features include simple, attractive interface design options; community engagement strategies; user-generated content tools; integration across other social media platforms, and a variety of revenue generating options.

[3]SHine SA are a government funded sexual health, education, and information agency. Their services include health clinics, counseling, community and professional education programs, library facilities and resources—including ''What's Your Story?'', a DVD compilation of the digital stories made in the 2009 workshops, accompanied by facilitator's guide.

[4]The research on which this article was based was conducted according to the ethical requirements of Queensland University of Technology, in compliance with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the QUT Code of Conduct for Research. Workshop participants were invited to contribute to the research project but it was made explicit that their participation in the digital storytelling workshops was not contingent on their participation in the research. The research consent form advised that participants may feel uncomfortable or fearful about sharing their personal stories in public and were offered the opportunity to create pseudonymous representations in their stories, web profiles and in DVD compilations and research outputs. Approaches to privacy and publicity and other prospective risks were also canvassed within the workshops themselves as part of general discussions regarding the question, ''Who is your audience and how do you find them?''. Facilitators were advised to be alert for signs of stress or anxiety and professional counseling

services were made available by the respective auspicing institutions (SHine SA and ACSA). All prospective members of the Web community are advised that the Rainbow Family Tree site is part of a research project. In all cases where specific stories or storytellers are mentioned in our research outputs they have been consulted as to whether they wish to be identified and, if so, how. Two storytellers in this article have elected to be represented by pseudonyms and others have stated that they are pleased to find another audience for their advocacy.

[5]For a more detailed discussion of the difficulties and opportunities resulting from this approach and the broader concerns of mediating voice see Vivienne (2011a).

[6]Participants who chose to have their stories included on a compilation DVD also submitted their own brief written statements about the process and end product.

[7]Recruitment procedures vary according to the requirements of the auspicing agency. They frequently involve e-mail flyers or calls for interest circulated via social service providers and community networks. Sometimes project officers or steering committees will suggest people they think might be interested. In all of the case studies represented in this article prospective participants were also contacted by phone prior to the workshop so that they would have opportunity to discuss any concerns with the facilitator.

[8]The workshops were auspiced by social service providers with particular health or education oriented objectives. We acknowledge the framing influence of these agendas (among many other factors), which is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Vivienne, 2011a).

[9]Iris Marion Young refers to various ways in which speaking across difference forges shifts in opinion among interlocutors, in some cases catalyzing social change: 1) confronting different perspectives teaches me the partiality of my own; 2) knowing that I am involved in problem solving these differences transforms self-interest into appeals for justice; 3) expressing and challenging differently situated knowledge adds to the social knowledge of all participants (Young, 1997, pp. 68–69).

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