Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MEd (University of Victoria, 2014)
MA (University of British Columbia, 2006)
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“More Than Just Theatre: Queer Theatre Festivals as Sites of Queer Community Building, Learning, Activism, and Leadership”

Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Friday, December 18 2020
1:00pm (PST)
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Darlene Clover, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic (Member)
Dr. Budd Hall, School of Public Administration, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Kristopher Wells, Faculty of Health & Community Studies, MacEwan University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Rachel Cleves, Department of History, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Through lenses of social movement theories, queer theory, intersectionality, performativity, and performance theory, my study employed a qualitative queer(y)ing methodology to explore how three queer theatre festivals contribute to the production of knowledge and learning, community building, leadership and activism in the queer social movement in Canada. The queer theatre festivals included The Rhubarb festival, Toronto, Pretty, Witty and GAY!, Lethbridge, and OUTstages, Victoria. Data collection methods included participant observation through festival attendance, a postcard survey, and semistructured interviews with festivalgoers, performers, and festival organizers.

Findings show that festivalgoers learned through the spoken words and visuals of the performances and their embodied/somatic reactions to the performances, self-reflection, collective discourse and reflection, festival design elements, self-learning following the festivals, and from creating a performance and performing. The learning that resulted had significant impacts on festivalgoers including empathy development, therapeutic and healing benefits, a sense of hope, allyship development, and personal transformation. The findings reveal the festivals’ wider societal benefits such as increased queer visibility in the communities, the power to shift societal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour as well as economic benefits. The study sheds light on the leadership potential of queer cultural activists and artists (artivist-activists) as it reveals how the festivals act as powerful cultural producing sites with individual and social transformation and learning possibilities. Finally, the study’s findings provide evidence that rejects claims that a new queer social movement exists and is distinct from the traditional gay and lesbian social movement.