



# Participatory Filmmaking Pedagogies in Schools: Tensions Between Critical Representation and Perpetuating Gendered and Heterosexist Discourses

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*ABSTRACT Although participatory media practices are often adopted to address social issues with youth in school and community contexts, there is a lack of critical analysis of the visual and discursive representations that organize student-produced participatory films. To respond to this concern, I employ critical discourse analysis to examine a series of films that were created for a New Brunswick school-based participatory filmmaking program that I coordinate, called What's up Doc? Since the project's inception in 2009, students have produced over 60 films that have raised institutional critiques, troubled inequitable discourses, and addressed social justice issues. Drawing attention to discourses that framed students' films, I show how the work may perpetuate, rather than fully resist, marginalizing discourses, narratives, and visual representations. In particular, I show how the films may reproduce and authorize sexist discourses, demeaning narratives, and heteronormative assumptions. Youth may have undertaken filmmaking to generate social commentary and resist inequity, but critical engagement with the What's up Doc? program demonstrates how discursive power operates on, in, and through participatory media texts.*

**KEYWORDS** participatory video; critical pedagogy; education; critical discourse analysis; critical filmmaking pedagogies

## Introduction

Although participatory media practices are often adopted in educational contexts to address social issues, there is a lack of critical analysis of the visual and discursive representations that organize student-produced participatory films. More generally, as Low, Brushwood Rose, Salvio and Palacios (2012, p. 50) suggest, when participatory media practices are

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adopted to address social justice issues, scholars often examine them using “celebratory and uncritical” narratives, which construct participatory video as a socio-political intervention strategy that is unquestionably empowering for marginalized groups. For the scholars above, and others like Walsh (2012, 2016), these dominant narratives tend to forestall critical analysis of participatory video approaches, projects, and products, and reduce the likelihood that practitioners and researchers will attend to how oppressive power relations operate on and through even the most self-reflexive participatory media project. Consequently, there is still a dearth of research that critically analyses the visual representations produced in these types of projects and the discursive patterns that organize youth participatory films (Kinson, 2003; Milne, Mitchell & de Lange, 2012). In this spirit, this paper employs critical discourse analysis (Krzyżanowski & Forchtner, 2016; Van Dijk, 1993) to examine a series of social justice oriented films that were created for the 2012 iteration of an annual New Brunswick school-based participatory filmmaking program called *What’s up Doc?*

I have been the coordinator of the *What’s up Doc?* program since 2009. The program emerged out of an earlier participatory filmmaking project I coordinated in a New Brunswick alternative education center, and formed the empirical focus of my PhD research (Rogers, 2014). I collaborated on the first project with my research supervisor, Dr. Linda Eyre, and the Muriel McQueen Centre for Family Violence Research at the University of New Brunswick. Following the initial collaboration, the regional school district Literacy Coordinator invited me to organize a larger participatory filmmaking initiative for Grade 11 youth in English Eleven-3 classrooms – a streamed literacy program for students who are deemed non-academic. The schools involved in the initiative are in the New Brunswick Anglophone School District-West and represent rural and urban contexts. Working closely with teachers and administrators, the program has provided me with an opportunity to explore the intersection of critical theories and pedagogies (Agger, 1998; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1981, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008), arts-based inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and participatory video (Milne, Mitchell & de Lange, 2012) with youth in school contexts.

Through a combination of critical and participatory filmmaking pedagogies (Mitchell, 2011), the *What’s up Doc?* program is designed to create opportunities for students and teachers to engage with collaborative filmmaking as a way to address issues of equity and social justice in their schools and communities. The pedagogies adopted in classrooms are intended to create spaces for youth voices and agency. Further, the pedagogies aim to open up possibilities for teachers and students to collaboratively address equity issues in schools and to inform institutional and social change from their perspectives. The program includes an annual *What’s up Doc?* film festival that is held once the films have been produced. The program provides openings for youth to mobilize critical social commentary to generate school-based and public dialogue on issues that affect their lives. Since the program

began in 2009, students and teachers have produced nearly 70 diverse films that have raised institutional critiques, troubled inequitable discourses, and addressed social justice issues.

Although I have worked collaboratively with teachers and students in *What's up Doc?* from its inception, the scope of this paper is limited to an analysis of elements of the third year of the program (2012). That year, teachers, students, and I collaborated on the production of seven short films on a range of social justice issues, including intersecting dimensions of class, gender, and dis/ability. At the 2012 film festival, the seven films, including a behind the scenes documentary, were screened to an audience of over 300, including youth, educators, administrators, the students' family, and the public. In this paper, engaging critically with the discourses that structure some of the *What's up Doc?* films demonstrates how the program, and the participatory student documentaries, do not escape the effects of power. For participatory media approaches to live up to the promise of promoting social justice, these types of representations, and their implications, cannot be assumed to have social justice outcomes simply because they adopt a participatory framework.

By drawing attention to the discourses that organize students' films, I ask how participatory video projects with youth, which are intended to address social inequities in school contexts, might also perpetuate marginalizing narrative and visual representations. In particular, I address how three of the seven 2012 *What's up Doc?* films reproduce sexist and heteronormative discourses. As *What's up Doc?* films perpetuate systems of marginalization despite of their social justice orientation, an approach that attempts to understand the complex and contradictory discursive effects of these films is essential to pedagogical social justice practice; simply adding participatory media production to classroom pedagogies does not guarantee social justice outcomes. Although the students' films may have created spaces to address critical issues related to equity, youth voice and agency, and institutional change, without critical engagement with these texts, educators and students may overlook how dominant discourses, marginalizing power relations, and institutional forces organize and are perpetuated by them.

To begin, I elaborate on the theoretical and pedagogical contexts of our work in the *What's up Doc?* program. Specifically, I speak to the influence of critical pedagogy and participatory video on our collaborative filmmaking initiatives. Next, I discuss my pedagogical and methodological collaborations with teachers and youth, focusing on how we use the context of participatory video projects as opportunities to explore social justice themes in the classroom. I then discuss critical discourse analysis, and use this approach to reflect on gendered and heterosexist representations in the films. I conclude with a series of reflections and suggestions for educators intending to use participatory media pedagogies with youth to address social justice issues.

### **Critical Pedagogy and Participatory Video**

Critical pedagogy applies critical social theories to the field of education to understand and resist systems of power and marginalization in schools and society (Kincheloe, 2008). Although the field has been shaped by various theoretical influences, it is generally accepted that it emerged from the post-WWII neo-Marxist theories of the German Institute for Social Research, more popularly known as the Frankfurt School (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009). Embracing a critical pedagogy requires resisting the notion that education is apolitical (Giroux, 2011; Luke & Gore, 1992; McLaren, 2009, 2017). Critical educators see schools as playing a role in both maintaining and resisting social inequalities through practice and discourse (Giroux, 1981, 2007; Lather, 1998). The *What's up Doc?* program is grounded in this thinking (Rogers, 2017) and is inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogical theories that oppose "banking" models of education. According to Freire, banking practices constrain youth agency by requiring students to passively ingest the politically sanctioned curricula of the day. When banking models are adopted, students are presented information with few opportunities for inquiry or critical reflection. For Freire, the paucity of agency and critical analysis in education practice encourages students to accept status-quo thinking, customs, and systems that maintain social and political inequity. Critical educators seeking to counter the dehumanizing implications of banking require classrooms that provide students with opportunities to raise questions and identify the workings of power within schools and society. To work toward socially just schooling practices, Freire argues, more participatory models of education in which power relations are renegotiated in classroom contexts, educators relinquish aspects of their authority, and students are recognized as active agents in learning processes are essential. For those who take up Freire's works, these approaches have the potential to be emancipatory because they address inequities in broader societal contexts.

Our work in the *What's up Doc?* program is also informed by other critical theories (see Rogers, 2017), including anti-racist (Dei, 2006, 2010), decolonizing (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999), and critical disability (Goodley, 2010). In this paper, feminist, gender, and queer theories (Butler, 1990; Connell, 2005, 2009; Lather, 1991, 1992; Launis & Hassel, 2015; Plummer, 2011; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) receive close attention. These critical frameworks provide the theoretical backdrop for my analysis of student projects.

Feminist scholars have mounted compelling critiques that trouble the field of critical pedagogy's scarce attention to themes of gender, patriarchal societies, and women's knowledge (Lather, 1998; Launis & Hassel, 2015). In a similar vein, queer theorists concerned that heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia remain unaddressed are pushing the terrain of the field (Graham, Treharne & Nairn, 2017). In recent decades, poststructuralist work in critical pedagogy (e.g., Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2009; Giroux, 2011; Porfilio & Ford, 2015) has critiqued the positivist and structuralist logic

embedded in early Marxist critical theories, thereby contributing to the development of feminist, queer, and disability theories (Plummer, 2011; Scherer, 2016). For those adopting poststructuralism, a singular focus on economic structures does not adequately capture the many forms of power and inequity at work in society. The grand narratives of Marxism and early critical theorists, and applications of Freire's critical pedagogies that romanticize the emancipatory potential of participatory education models, often neglect other systems of privilege and marginalization. In developing an analytical approach that traces multiple and intersecting forms of social inequity, poststructural theorists propose a nuanced and complex understanding of power. For example, Foucault (1995) and Lather (1991) argue that, beyond economic and organizational structures of societies, power operates through discourse and the construction of knowledge. Poststructuralism thus marks a turn away from the structural and ideological focus of critical theory, toward the power/knowledge relation (Foucault & Gordon, 1980).

For Foucault, knowledge, and the process of its construction, is tied to the power relations that organize the context of its production (Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Rogers, 2012). Institutional power relations give rise to a set of epistemological rules that shape how knowledge is negotiated in a given context. Foucault (1970) refers to these foundational rules as discourse (i.e., the grammatological foundations of truth of a society), and the historical set of rules that structure and organize discourses of a given society as the *épistémè*. For Foucault, the rules a society uses to distinguish true and false statements are arbitrary because societies can adopt different truth-making practices. This means that discourses and *épistémès* are never neutral; rather, they are tied to the power relations in an historical epoch and place/society. Social institutions produce and perpetuate knowledge, and the rules governing its production, in ways that maintain their social positioning. By endorsing or rejecting the rules through which a society produces knowledge, discourses and the *épistémè* retain power, structuring the possibilities of how people can think, behave, rationalize, and talk in a social context (Cook, 2007; Mills, 2004). Discursive regulations of knowledge production can include those related to who is permitted to be a knowledge producer (e.g., experts, scientists, the able-bodied, men), what methods must be followed to produce truth (e.g., scientific, quantitative, or qualitative), or what institutions are authorized to be knowledge producers (e.g., church, governments, schools, business). The strength of discourses and the *épistémè* are ensured by excluding and delegitimizing knowledge that is not produced through sanctioned discursive systems. For Foucault, Bertani, Fontana, Ewald and Macey (2003), this powerful exclusion leads to subjugated knowledges, meaning, the positioned knowledges of those who are marginalized by the organization of the *épistémè*.

Poststructuralist notions of power/knowledge and discourse have influenced feminist and queer theorists (e.g., Lather, 1991, 1998; Kirsch, 2000), who

have shown how patriarchal power shapes and operates through the construction of knowledge of gender and identity, and how heterosexual/homophobic/transphobic societal power relations are connected to essentialist binary discourses of gender and sexuality. In the field of critical pedagogy, the theory of power/knowledge has drawn attention to the necessity of resisting discourses that contribute to systems of privilege and marginalization (Fairclough, 2013; Haddow, 2017). For example, feminist and queer critical educators have mounted compelling critiques of the knowledge systems of mainstream education, showing how they are often shaped by patriarchal and heteronormative discourses (Plummer, 2011; Robinson, 2005; Rodriguez, Martino, Ingrei & Brockenbrough, 2016).

Feminist, queer, and Foucauldian theories of discourse have been influential in the *What's up Doc?* program, and are particularly important for my analysis below. The films produced by students in the 2012 iteration of the program critique gendered and heteronormative discourses and call for institutional action and change that will support more equitable social practices associated with gender and sexuality. The films strive to represent subjugated knowledges and borrow from feminist and queer theories to resist inequity, the institutional practices that support it, and the discourses through which it is maintained. Specifically, the films discussed here show how youth produced narratives and visual representations that exemplify and/or directly critique sexist and homophobic discourses.

Although some films highlight youth agency and students' successes with social critique, my analysis reminds us that power does not cease to operate simply because a film adopts critical discourses and representations. Before addressing this contradiction more fully, I discuss the particular critical pedagogical method that underpins the *What's up Doc?* program: participatory video.

Participatory video methods tend to encompass collaborative video-based inquiry pursuits by grassroots groups and researchers, practitioners, or media-producers (Milne, 2016; Rogers, 2017). As collaborative approaches, these media-based methods are also informed by, and build on, participatory action research (Whyte, 1991). In participatory research, inspired by the work of Freire (1970), community-based research partners are typically involved in identifying themes for social inquiry, planning and implementing research processes, and sharing the knowledge produced through the study. Historically, feminist scholars have played a key role in designing and implementing participatory research and pedagogical approaches as a way to challenge power relations and the politics of knowledge production (Maguire & University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1987; Rogers, 2016). Elaborating on how participatory research presents opportunities for more equitable approaches to inquiry, Oliver, de Lange, Creswell and Wood (2012) argue that participatory methods support social justice by creating spaces where the agency and knowledge of marginalized people and groups can be fostered, rallied, and mobilized.

Like participatory research more generally, participatory video is often used to challenge traditional inquiry practices by privileging multiple interpretive perspectives and validating the voices of research and filmmaking participants. Participatory video also tends to be implemented in community contexts as a media-based vehicle to address social and political inequalities (Milne, Mitchell & de Lange, 2012; White, 2003). When participatory video projects are undertaken, practices tend to value dispersed control over the direction of film narratives, and non-hierarchical media collaborations that run counter to traditional filmmaking structures. This shift in filmmaking power dynamics is intended to encourage the representation and mobilization of subjugated knowledges of individuals and groups who are marginalized in public policy and institutional discussions. Elaborating on this point, Plush (2012, p. 79) suggests that participatory video “can be especially valuable for marginalized groups that are often shut out of policy debates and decisions that affect their lives.”

Although participatory video tends to embody a collaborative spirit (Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell & de Lange, 2011), it is important to remember that, like all educational or interventionist strategies, this approach is influenced by social power dynamics (Mookejea, 2010; Plush, 2012; Shaw, 2012; Walsh, 2012), and therefore requires critical and nuanced analysis of its methodological complexities and representational politics. For example, when Mitchell, de Lange, and Moletsane (2016) propose that adopting cellphone technologies might help practitioners negotiate questions of power, ownership, and sustainability in participatory video projects, they temper their argument by suggesting that cellphones may also open up projects to a whole new set of ethical complexities and political tensions. Similarly, Walsh (2016, p. 405-6) raises critical questions about how participatory video projects often rely on unquestioned discourses of neoliberal empowerment. She reminds us that when projects are understood in individualistic ways, “systemic power relations often continue to be overlooked ... [and] personal empowerment [is emphasized] over broader social and political forces.” Shaw (2016) introduces another issue by complicating the politics and the role of participatory video project coordinators. Although she agrees that facilitators should avoid paternalistic approaches, Shaw argues that complex power dynamics exist within groups involved in participatory video projects, and that hands-off approaches may not always be appropriate or ethical. These examples echo Kindon’s (2016, p. 501) view that, although participatory video has the “ability to facilitate participant empowerment ... [this assumption] must be tempered by greater critical engagement with the complexities of power” that structure the process and representational outcomes of participatory video. As Milne (2016, p. 402) suggests, these critical voices provoke much needed “debate and encourage readers to critically reflect on their own research and participatory video practices.” This paper contributes to such critical reflection by showing that whereas participatory video production may support youth agency, it can

simultaneously perpetuate marginalizing discourses and systems of power, and therefore undermine, rather than support, broader projects of social justice.

### **The “*What’s up Doc?*” program**

The *What’s up Doc?* program, teachers, and administrators – myself included – were motivated by the idea that participatory pedagogies have the potential to support social justice by making room for student agency and critical social and institutional commentary (Rogers, 2017). A student who I interviewed in 2012 expresses this sentiment when he describes the *What’s up Doc?* program as an action-oriented process that signifies a shift in youth agency and school power dynamics: “We get to voice our own . . . opinions, whereas, if we were just in like regular class, we wouldn’t have the opportunity . . . in this we actually get to say [and do] . . . something about it.” His observation echoes our assumption that classroom-based participatory video is a good starting point from which to make space for marginalized voices and subjugated knowledges in this institutional context. Each year, students choose topics for critical inquiry and engage with documentary filmmaking to generate dialogue on a range of social justice issues. In a collaborative setting, they are encouraged to explore their topics through different theoretical lenses. In this spirit, the *What’s up Doc?* program attempts to adopt participatory critical filmmaking pedagogies to engage youth in “building and mobilizing knowledge from their perspectives; [examining] power relations between individuals, institutions, and societies; generating important societal and institutional critique; and spurring and mobilizing reflection, dialogue, and informed social action” (Rogers, 2017, p. 232). We view participatory video as an opportunity to raise critical dialogues that could address marginalizing discourses and social practices.

During the 2012 iteration of the program, I collaborated with five high school teachers (three women and two men) in three literacy classes to implement a series of seven filmmaking projects. In the *What’s up Doc?* program, we used participatory video as a critical pedagogy (Rogers, 2017) to

- explore questions of power, equity, privilege, and marginalization in education and society,
- introduce students to analysis that is informed by an intersection of, and debates between, multiple critical social theories (e.g., Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, post-colonialist, dis/ability studies, and queer theories), and,
- question and move beyond individualizing discourses (i.e., discourses that locate analysis, critiques, or action at the level of the individual, and fail to incorporate a focus at the level of discourse, institutions, or social organization).

In introducing the program to students, we proposed that they would have the opportunity to share their voice and generate social commentary on issues

they deemed important to their lives. We also suggested that the projects would include a participatory classroom dynamic, which would allow them to speak back to social and institutional power.

In 2012, the program involved one Grade 10 and four Grade 11 English Language Arts classes. The students in these classes were between 15 and 18 years old, and the group represented a mix of male and female-identifying students, with a slightly larger population of male-identifying students. Over a 12 week period, I split my time between the five classrooms. I provided professional development sessions and workshops on the conventions of filmmaking, and I collaborated with the teachers to develop filmmaking pedagogies for their classrooms. Through critical reflection, the teachers and I engaged in frequent modifications of our filmmaking pedagogies. Ongoing informal planning sessions occurred daily, before and after school, at lunchtime, and via email correspondence. I also used this time to work with the teachers on critical approaches to social commentary. For example, we discussed how the themes students were exploring in their films could be analyzed with different forms of social criticism (e.g., feminist, Marxist, queer, anti-racist, dis/ability).

Whereas the filmmaking procedures carried out during *What's up Doc?* were planned systematically, the approach the teachers and I used in introducing students to critical theories and social justice issues was far less structured. At no point did we have formal lectures or lessons on Marxist, feminist, queer, anti-racist, or dis/ability studies perspectives. Rather, critical theories were introduced through discussion, workshops, or feedback when they became relevant to the themes, issues, and circumstances that the students presented in their films. The decision to introduce topics in this way relates to an attempt to negotiate the participatory elements of the program. Students were in charge of choosing their themes for the films, and the teachers and I used the participatory context as a springboard for discussions about discourse and power. The most explicit discussions of critical theories occurred in class activities, when the teachers and I asked the students to analyze visual media texts. For example, we sometimes asked students to critique media for gendered, homophobic, or racialized representations. Critical discussions of representations were mostly addressed on an *ad hoc* basis with students during writing, production, and post-production activities. For instance, the students' scripts gave us an opportunity to pose questions related to issues of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and homophobia.

Because *What's up Doc?* occurs in a classroom/curricular context, it is important to consider how institutional practices of schooling shape the program and influence how students react to, or work through, the experience. For example, school assessment practices may have some influence on how students negotiate their work and collaborations. Although the program places value on resisting inequitable institutional practices, locating this work in a curricular context presents a contradiction: *what if students resist the pedagogies associated with participatory filmmaking projects?* Although the

program is designed with a participatory framework, implicitly coercive schooling practices encourage students to engage in the work whether or not they want to participate. There can be academic, assessment-based, and institutional consequences if students resist the *What's up Doc?* program. For educators taking on these kinds of projects, this contradiction is important to consider (Milne, 2012). Any agentic expression of resistance that students express through non-participation points to how power is being negotiated in these collaborations. It also provides a glimpse into how participatory video practices, when implemented in school contexts, are still an instrument of institutional power. The coercive power of assessment also raises ethical questions. Assigning a grade to participatory projects put the onus on students to participate without fully recognizing the potential repercussions of their involvement. It is quite likely that some students feel uncomfortable participating in large group discussions about social justice issues. Public expressions could appear to be overly personal, contentious, and even dangerous (Ellsworth, 1992; Roman & Eyre, 1997), and the recognition of its potentially threatening nature just begins to point to some of the complexities associated with adopting participatory video projects in schools. I elaborate on a few more complexities below by examining gendered and heterosexist representations in the students' 2012 films. First, however, I discuss how I employed critical discourse analysis in the film analyses.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Drawing on Foucauldian theories of power/knowledge (Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Foucault et al., 2003; Rogers, 2016), critical discourse analysis is used to examine how language and texts are structured by discourse and power. As discussed above, Foucault describes discourse as the regulatory framework that shapes knowledge and gives language and text meaning in a given socio-historical context. Discourse can be understood as the negotiated sets of epistemological rules that a given society uses to produce and endorse truth claims and normative behaviours (Mills, 2004). For Foucault, knowledge, truth claims, and discourse are never neutral, but are culturally negotiated based on power. As he states:

Truth is a thing of this world . . . And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault & Gordon, 1980, p. 133)

The sanctioned discursive rules of a society render what is deemed intelligible and what counts as truth. Therefore, discourse is a force that limits “what can

be said and not said” (Locke, 2004, p. 34), and even what can be thought in a given social context. For Mills (2004, p. 10), discourses do not only shape knowledge in a socio-historical context, but they are also a productive force that ensures power relations in that context are maintained. Or, as she puts it, discourses “are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence.” Providing further elaboration on theories of discourse, Cook (2007) reminds us of Foucault’s view that power and discourse are not fixed, immutable, or stable, but, rather, contested and constantly in a state of negotiation and collision. Cook (2007, p. 17) writes:

Discourses structure meaning, thought, and action in all realms of social life. But they are not unified or unchanging. There is a multitude or regime of competing, converging discourses circulating in every society, each relevant to a particular realm of social action and subject to challenge and transformation.

It is this frailty and fallibility of discourse that those who adopt critical discourse analysis to advance social justice find most promising and productive. In this respect, they take up the method to consider how power discursively organizes speech and text, and disrupt discursive formations that give rise to social inequity (Krzyżanowski & Forchtner, 2016; Rogers, 2004). For example, my choice to use critical discourse analysis to examine how heteronormative discourse structured some of the *What’s up Doc?* films is tied to my belief that this mode of inquiry can interrupt, contest, and help to renegotiate some of the discursive social foundations that marginalize LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning/Queer, Intersexed, Asexual, “+” those who identify with non-heteronormative sexual identities) people and communities. My view relates to Foucault’s (1978, p. 101) argument that “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling bloc, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy.” Following this perspective, I recognize how politicizing discourse can open possibilities for re/imagining knowledge and circumstances to support equity and social justice (Van Dijk, 1993). In this research, critiquing heteronormative and homophobic discourses that structure some of the narratives in the *What’s up Doc?* films gives students, teachers, and me a “starting point” from which to attempt to disrupt taken-for-granted heteronormative powers.

This paper represents one element of my critical analysis of discourse and representation in the *What’s up Doc?* program. Here, I show how three of the seven 2012 *What’s up Doc?* films were influenced by gendered, sexist, and heterosexist discourses. Because *What’s up Doc?* is envisioned to support youth agency, it is vital that we, as the educators and practitioners involved, develop deep understandings of how discourse shapes our work and collaborations. During production of the films, teachers, students, and I would often have conversations about discourses that might be influencing the films

and representations. I pursue an analysis of these elements in my doctoral research, examining how competing discourses produce meaning and shape representations in the students' final film texts. For this, I consulted field notes and footage for examples of discourses that teachers, students, and I identified during the program. I also completed a number of close readings of students' scripts and viewings of the final films.

My analysis of narrative representations in the films includes considerations of dialogue and utterances, text title cards, and the selection of shots, camera angles, editing, and character choices. For example, to analyze how discourses around gender and sexuality structure the films, I examine how representational choices in the films can be understood through Mulvey's (1975) concept of the "male gaze." I also draw on Connell's (2005, 2009) theories on gender, sexuality, and power to articulate how essentialist discourses structure dialogue. The work of scholars who analyze representations of gender in advertising and media texts was also helpful (e.g., Giannino & Campbell, 2012; Schroeder, 2007; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). This type of work helped me explore how the positioning of men and women, and the camera angles through which they are represented, are shaped by discourse. My analysis also considers the films in light of critical concepts like heterosexism and heteronormativity (Robinson, 2005) to show how the work may have been structured by, and contributed to, systems of heterosexual privilege.

While my analysis here problematizes some representations in the films, many of the discourses that organize the films are critical in nature and support social justice knowledge. For example, the films authorize subjugated knowledges and resist discourses that perpetuate systems of privilege and marginalization in terms of gender and sexuality. However, contradictory representations in the films complicate these emancipatory possibilities. By critiquing the students' films, I do not mean to undercut the agency or knowledge of the youth involved. Rather, my analysis is intended to offer a reminder that all educational practices, even those intending to enact subjugated knowledge and support social justice, are shaped by and cannot escape power. I am also aware that problematic power dynamics limit and shape my analysis. In future projects with youth, I will incorporate time for participatory discourse analyses with youth participants – an approach that may prove to be a better way to represent their voices and contributions and co-construct detailed analyses of their films. My analysis here draws on Van Dijk's (1993) insight that making power visible can open important spaces for resistance and discursive re-negotiation. I hope this work can be helpful in identifying and subverting some of the inequitable discursive patterns that influence the *What's up Doc?* program.

## The Films

In 2012, seven films were screened to an audience of over 300 at a theatre at the University of New Brunswick. The films tackle a range of social justice issues, including the stigma of mental illnesses, the cost of healthy eating in schools, and ability and intelligence. To draw out some of the complexities and tensions involved in using participatory video approaches in schools, my analysis raises questions about discourses of gender and sexuality that structured three of the 2012 films: *Challenging the Norm*; *That Girl: One Little Heartbeat*; and *Step Back, Move Ahead* (Table 1)

| Film                                   | Description   |
|--|---|
| <i>Challenging the Norm</i>            | This film addresses how sexist and heterosexist discourses and essentialist thinking can be marginalizing in schools. As one student put it, the film challenges thinking like “girls are not supposed to play sports” or “guys are not supposed to be interested in fashion.”  |
| <i>That Girl: One Little Heartbeat</i> | As a student explained, the film centers on “the struggle that teen parents go through.” It addresses the personal, social, and economic implications of the absence of in-school daycare provisions for teen parents. Through interviews with former teen-parents the filmmakers suggest that discourses around teen parenting influenced the decision to halt daycare services in their school. |
| <i>Step Back, Move Ahead</i>           | This film explores the economic sustainability of rural communities. In particular, the filmmakers focus on how gas prices increase the cost of living for people living in rural areas. As one student explained: “everyone is moving now, because of the gas... they just can’t afford to live out here the way things are going.”  |

Table 1. Brief synopsis of student 2012 *What’s up Doc?* films.

## Gendered, Sexist, and Essentialist Discourses

Both *Challenging the Norm* and *That Girl* focus on how essentialized discourses of femininity and masculinity constitute social systems of privilege and marginalization. They trouble determinist and essentialist perspectives that divide men and women into rigid gender categories and draw attention to how patriarchal and heteronormative discourses structure Western societies. They also resist gender dichotomies, and show how hierarchal gendered discourses are confining, marginalizing, and lead to violent situations.

*Challenging the Norm* employs a critical tone by celebrating high school-aged youth whose performance of gender resists essentializing discourses and practices. Feminist scholarship has long demonstrated how essentializing discourses structure a bifurcated view of men and women as having natural,

opposing, and fixed characteristics that dictate temperament and behavior (Launis & Hassel, 2015). Connell (2009) illuminates the connection between essentialist discourses and power in discussing how these discourses have historically disenfranchised women in the Western world. As she states:

Women are supposed to have one set of traits, men another. Women are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic and promiscuous. These ideas have been strong in Western culture since the 19th century, when the belief that women had weaker intellects and lacks capacity for judgment than men was used to justify their exclusion from universities and from the vote. (Connell, 2009, p. 60)

As Connell and feminist theorists have demonstrated, the dominance of essentializing discourses maintain inequities, patriarchal social systems, and gender-based violence.

*Challenging the Norm* resists essentializing discourses by taking audiences through four vignettes that show how these discourses contribute to gender-based marginalization. The first vignette involves a young man who applies for a position at a women's clothing store; the second portrays a female hockey player who encounters sexist gendered assumptions; the third tells the story of a young woman who is ridiculed for her competence in online video games; and the last tells the story of a male football player whose peers degrade him for his interest in fashion. Each vignette in the film includes a device the students called a "power statement." These statements "break the fourth wall," meaning the characters look directly into the camera to address the audience. Through their statements, the young filmmakers question representations of appropriate gender performance and advocate for equitable social acceptance for youth who perform gender in ways that do not reflect essentialized understandings. By challenging essentialized gendered binaries and celebrating an array of gendered expressions, the film relates to Butler's (1990) view of gender as performative. Although gender is actively constructed based on the discourses available in a given context, Butler's theory of performativity incorporates agency in relation to how one practices a gendered identity. Butler argues that subjects are not passive, but actively involved in producing gender on a moment to moment basis through embodied action. In this way, gender is a verb and not an adjective. The notion of performance creates space to resist and disrupt dominant gender discourses, and leaves room for individuals to explore agency in their performances of gender.

Although *That Girl* adopts a different theme – the closure of a school daycare program – it also engages in critiques of essentialized gender discourse. Specifically, the film examines how dominant discourses of femininity support oppressive social practices that marginalize teen mothers. As the filmmakers explain, teen mothers, and young women who engage in sexual activity, more generally, are often shamed by being represented as

“sluts” and “whores.” The film shows how discourses of femininity function to mark teen mothers as deviant, thereby legitimizing their social marginalization.

These aspects of the films demonstrate how student filmmakers used their work to critique sexist, hierarchal, and essentialist gender discourses. Nevertheless, to develop more critical and nuanced understandings of the work associated with *What's up Doc?*, it is important to recognize how these films, and others in the series, can also authorize marginalizing gendering discourses and practices. *Step Back, Move Ahead* is one example. To address issues of rural poverty, the film employs a series of caricatured fictional vignettes to show how increases in the cost of living disproportionately affect people living outside urban communities. Although each of the vignettes is meant to satirize economic structures and classing practices, taken-for-granted elements support demeaning gender discourses. For example, the film positions male characters as dominant and rational, and females as irrational and childlike. Young women serve solely as plot devices and objects for men, or they are altogether absent. There are no female protagonists in any of the vignettes. In the first, the protagonist is a young man who wants to borrow his father's car; in the second, it is a young man who has to sell his truck; in the third, it is the rural male landowner. Even a song written for the film, *Riverbend*, tells a story of a man who faces economic hardship.

As I have briefly discussed in another text (Rogers, 2017), unreflexive casting and character choices in *Step Back, Move Ahead* highlight the structuring influence of patriarchy in the *What's up Doc?* films. In this paper, I provide additional theoretical analysis of these choices, and of the representations of men and women in *Step Back, Move Ahead* that are organized by discourses of women's subordination. One vignette in the film foregrounds two teens, whose plans to go on a date are thwarted by the young man's father. Two elements in the scene perpetuate marginalizing gender discourses, the first being the initial exchange between the two teens (one male-identifying and one female-identifying). The young man is depicted as composed and self-confident when he asks the young woman on the date. However, this cool performance is not mirrored in the young woman's response. After hanging up the phone she screams, “He's coming at eight!” Her reaction in this scene is structured by patriarchal gender discourses that also organize most popular culture media texts. Understanding how the male gaze influences media representations is useful to this discussion. For Mulvey (1975), dominant Western cinematic conventions function to support patriarchal assumptions. In theorizing Mulvey's notions of the male gaze, in relation to reality television, Giannino and Campbell (2012, p. 62) citing (Gamman & Marshman, 1989), explain that:

Mulvey contends that film serves the political function of subjugating female bodies and experiences to the interpretation and control of a heterosexual male gaze. According to Mulvey, any viewers' potential to experience visual and

visceral pleasure from watching Hollywood movies is completely predicated upon acceptance of a patriarchal worldview in which men look and women are looked at; men act and women are acted upon. She further contends that this distinctly male-oriented perspective perpetuates sexual inequality by forcing the viewer, regardless of gender, to identify with and adopt a perspective that dehumanizes women.

On the screen, this translates into constructions of heterosexual men as active doers and constructions of women as objects for men's pleasure. In recent years, Mulvey (interviewed in Sassatelli, 2011) and her contemporaries have interrogated some of the initial, deterministic conceptualizations of male gaze (Abbott, Wallace, & Tyler, 2005). Unquestionably, the concept of the male gaze can support the view that audiences have no agency and are "forced" to accept patriarchal worldviews, but I acknowledge the agency of the viewer to support or resist discourse. Nevertheless, I remain troubled by demeaning gender discourses in popular visual texts and in *Step Back: Move Ahead*. Evolving perspectives on the concept of male gaze help me recognize how elements of the vignette that depict the budding relationship between the two teens can perpetuate oppressive social conditions through dominant gender discourses.

The contrasting performance and positioning of the characters perpetuates representations of subordinate femininity. This means that the scene, as I have previously stated (Rogers, 2017, p. 234), "has the potential to validate problematic discourses that suggest that young women's value is only related to their relationship with young men." In the film, the young man enjoys a position of authority, while the young woman is constructed as a passive sexual object for his consumption. The text constructs the female character as if she is utterly fulfilled by the male character's attention. The young man is in control, whereas at the prospect of a date, the young woman is represented as animated, emotional, irrational, and almost childlike. In clear contrast, the young man does not reciprocate the sentiment and behaves like the relationship is inconsequential. In reflecting on how the young man is represented as dispassionate, and the young woman as if she thinks she is fortunate to be able to date the boy, it becomes possible to garner how male gaze and patriarchal discourse structure the scene. Specifically, the narrative is structured by a discursive arrangement that suggests that women hold a subordinate societal position, and that their social worth is tied to their ability to establish romantic bonds with men.

In terms of gender discourses, the exchange between the boy and his father in the next scene is also troublesome. Although the scene is satirical and intended to provide an absurd comedic example of the consequences of economic conditions, elements of the vignette are structured by sexist discourse. For example, degrading and objectifying discourses organize the father's stern reply to the boy's request for the family vehicle. Like his son, the father's demeanor, and his disregard for the young woman, are shaped by patriarchal discourse when he says, "Why don't you date a girl from

Williamsburg?” – as if the boy’s current love interest is an object he can simply discard and replace with another girl who lives nearby. In this way, the father positions women as objects for men’s pleasure and supports a patriarchal social system.

### **Heteronormative, Heterosexist, and Homophobic Discourse**

Gendered discourses and hierarchies in *What’s up Doc?* films are also perpetuated through heterosexist discourses and narrative representations. Although some of the students sought to use their films to explore feminist and LGBTQIA+ themes, attention to elements of their narrative work shows how some films are also structured by essentializing heteronormative discourse that tacitly support homophobic or transphobic assumptions. Queer theories, drawing on poststructuralist and feminist perspectives on gender, have shown how essentializing discourses not only maintain patriarchal privilege, but also co-constitute heteronormativity, heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia (Launis & Hassel, 2015; Eyre, 1993; Payne, 2010; Rich, 1980). Queer theory, as Plummer (2011, p. 197) states, “is the postmodernization of sexual and gender studies. ‘Queer’ brings with it a radical deconstruction of all conventional categories of sexuality and gender.” By elaborating on theories of gender and sexuality, queer theorists have demonstrated how the dominance of essentializing discourses in societies propagates an assumption that appropriate sexual behavior is based on binary biological sex categories. For queer theorists, this has meant that taken-for-granted essentializing discourses have long constituted heteronormative societies that privilege heterosexual people and marginalize everyone else. As Schilt and Westbrook (2009, p. 443) explain:

Heterosexuality – like masculinity and femininity – is taken for granted as a natural occurrence derived from biological sex. Heterosexual expectations are embedded in social institutions, “guarantee [ing] that some people will have more class status, power, and privilege than others” (Ingraham 1994, 212). The hierarchical gender system that privileges masculinity also privileges heterosexuality. Its maintenance rests on the cultural devaluation of femininity and homosexuality . . . The gender system must be conceived of as *heterosexist*, as power is allocated via positioning in gender and sexual hierarchies.

In other words, societies structured by heteronormative privilege, afforded through taken-for-granted essentialized understandings of sexuality, contribute to systems of marginalization and abuse of LGBTQIA+ people, or those who do not neatly fit into supposedly natural gender dichotomies.

In some ways, all of the films produced through the 2012 *What’s up Doc?* program perpetuate heteronormative and heterosexist discourses, despite the recent prevalence of critiques of homophobic and transphobic violence in schools. In the years leading up to 2012, LGBTQIA+ themes were never

explicitly addressed in the *What's up Doc?* films, which points to implicit heterosexism and heteronormativity. 2012 marked a shift in how explicit students were about sexuality themes. However, a critique of discourses that structure these films shows how LGBTQIA+ themes may have been addressed in ways that perpetuate heterosexist privilege. For example, even though *Challenging the Norm* critiques some gendered discourses, it simultaneously perpetuates gendered hierarchies, heterosexism, and homophobia. In one vignette, two boys tease the protagonist – a male football player – for wearing a shirt from the Gap, calling him effeminate for having shopped at the store. They articulate “I got it at Gap” by elongating the emphasis on the letter “a” in the store name and kinking their hands at the wrist, implying that his clothing choice is inappropriate for a heterosexual male and therefore open to ridicule. Although the scene might not explicitly condone the homophobic assumptions presented by the two antagonists, it perpetuates sexist, heterosexist, and homophobic discourse by endorsing pejorative associations to characteristics considered feminine or gay. The heterosexist power in the scene provides an opportunity for critical engagement; however, this opportunity is never seized by the performers. After the two boys hurl insults and leave the frame, the protagonist’s girlfriend offers him support saying, “Don’t listen to him, he’s stupid. You are more of a man than he will ever be.” Rather than challenging the pejorative notion that his clothes signify gayness, her comment affirms the homophobia of the two boys. She implies that being a “man” (i.e., conforming to hegemonic masculinity that is unquestioningly heterosexual) is a good thing, with heterosexist and sexist discursive implications. Her argument reaffirms the homophobia articulated by the two boys. Read this way, the young woman’s comment, rather than seizing an opportunity to challenge homophobic discourses, questions the idea that wearing particular clothing is a signifier of homosexuality. In this way the film is organized by a pejorative heteronormative discourse.

A similar situation arises in another vignette in *Challenging the Norm*, where the filmmakers attempt to disrupt sexist and homophobic discourses that marginalize women in sport. A title card in the film reads, “Gender doesn’t influence skill level, gaining confidence and skill doesn’t make you butch.” Although this may not have been the students explicit intention, the suggestion that success in sport “doesn’t make you butch” pejoratively construct lesbian, bisexual, or trans women who participate in sport. This exercise of power is reiterated elsewhere in the film. The opening scene depicts the protagonist, a female hockey player, applying makeup and lipstick – signifiers of heterosexual femininity – while dressing in hockey gear. Although the vignette challenges gender discourses that associate athletic women (a process of masculinization) with lesbianism, the film simultaneously perpetuates notions that behaviours associated with butchness should be moderated by practices of “emphasized femininity” (Connell, 2005). As with the previous vignette, this story presents instances when

heterosexist discourse could be challenged. For example, comments that the female hockey player “must be butch or something,” and the title-card “being good at sports doesn’t make you butch” present an opportunity to challenge heteronormativity. Unfortunately, the critical opportunity was missed.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Educators**

As this analysis has shown, some of the 2012 *What’s up Doc?* films draw on critical theories to challenge inequitable discourses. The students’ critical intent to create change on social and institutional levels is evident in their efforts to use their films to incite dialogue about topics like gender, class, sexuality, and ability. According to advocates of participatory video, critical and political dialogue among youth peers, and between youth and people in positions of institutional power, can be the roots of political action and social change. The video project, therefore, supports Mitchell et al.’s (2010, p. 220) view that “critical awareness and (arguably) empowerment [can] result when media production [with youth is] encouraged.” The *What’s up Doc?* program provided a space and opportunities for critical dialogue among students, teachers, and school administrators during the program, and when the films screened at the film festival. In 2012, this was exemplified when we held a panel discussion after the film screenings to allow the filmmakers to address questions about their films. During the conversations, the students had a chance to continue the critical discussions and institutional critiques they raised in their films with the audience – made up of teachers, administrators, friends, family, and local policy makers. These conversations focused on issues of power, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. All of the films, the in-class discussions, and the festival panel discussion carved out space for critical perspectives on discourse, status quo conditions, and the contemporary social practices that create them.

However, this analysis also reaffirms that power does not cease to operate simply because critical or participatory pedagogies have been implemented (Ellsworth, 1992; Lather, 1991; Lather, 1992; Rogers, 2016; Wheeler, 2012). Because many of the discourses that structure the *What’s up Doc?* films contribute to systems of marginalization, there is a need to engage in deep analysis about issues of representation when undertaking participatory video pedagogies with youth. Although there are many ways that this analysis can inform practice, curriculum, and policy, below I identify a few of the most important.

First, for educators, this analysis demonstrates the need for vigilance in challenging marginalizing discourses that structure participatory filmmaking and critical pedagogy initiatives, as well as the productions themselves. A critical analysis of *What’s up Doc?* reminds practitioners that all texts, even those intended to support social justice, can perpetuate systems of marginalization and power. As educators committed to social justice, we must

reflect on why and how this happens. At the same time, however, to negotiate practices that are based on collaborative democratic participation, we must also find ways to challenge problematic representations without relying on authoritarian pedagogical approaches that seek to control the direction of students' work.

Second, when critical participatory filmmaking pedagogies are adopted, it is vital that projects are not rushed or implemented without opportunities for critical self-reflection. For critical reflection on work to be meaningful, educators and students require structured and consistent opportunities to problematize all texts produced. During our collaborations in the *What's up Doc?* program, many opportunities for critical analysis were missed or overlooked, which was often a result of our efforts to navigate the politics and complexities of participatory video work in a public school context. Had schedules been more flexible and schools open to interdisciplinary programs that permit the exploration of critical themes in more rounded ways, perhaps these politics would be quite different. In the *What's up Doc?* program, institutional constraints, disciplinary boundaries, and the fact that specific curriculum outcomes had to be addressed by the end of the term, influenced how much time we had and how frequently we were able to engage in critical reflection with students. The rushed context, especially during production and editing phases, usually produced superficial discussion at best.

During the early months of the project, we were committed to critical analysis, but as deadlines loomed, our priorities often shifted toward completing a finished, aesthetically pleasing final product for the festival. Our preoccupation with production value echoes Thomas and Britton's (2012, p. 215) concerns about participatory video aesthetics. They suggest that the value of participatory video work is often framed in a "process/product binary." For those adopting participatory video methods, it is sometimes favorable to assume that the collaborative process, rather than the media product, is of most value in terms of advancing social justice. This emphasis on process relates to the claim that, as a "tool for social change" (p. 214), participatory video projects can support agency, critical consciousness, and collective action amongst grassroots groups. During the *What's up Doc?* program, teachers, students, and I had to negotiate how much value we placed on the creative/reflective process or on achieving a final product for the festival. As much as it is favorable to assume (especially in an educational context) that the process is always more important than the final product, it was important for us to remember how these products exist within powerful social and institutional contexts. This recognition relates to Thomas and Britton's (2012, p. 216) view that a sole focus on process is problematic, because this overlooks how the media texts that get produced are shaped by and "embedded in social relations. These relations are between facilitator and participants, participants themselves, and participants and audiences."

In the *What's up Doc?* program, the process of critically analyzing our own film work, particularly nearing the time for the festival, was sometimes

deprioritized because of concerns related to social, institutional, and audience responses to the work. For example, students had to negotiate how they were creating films to satisfy their teacher's academic expectations and curriculum outcomes structured by the provincial government. Students may have had to think about how their films, and the messages embedded in them, could create tensions or consequences for them in the classroom, or at school. This might have meant that some critical lines of analysis and dialogue were halted before they were even initiated. Furthermore, concluding the *What's up Doc?* program with a formal public event also means that social relations beyond the classroom must be considered. The public festival puts the eyes and ears of peers, parents, teachers, and administrators on these projects. This broader attention adds a layer of pressure and ethical complexity for students and teachers. Nearing the time of the festival, teachers and students often begin to consider how their work will be received by a larger audience. In these instances in 2012, priorities sometimes shifted away from content and process, to trying to achieve a high quality aesthetic in the final product. As some students expressed, this was because they wanted to create products they would feel comfortable sharing with audiences. In hindsight, it is apparent how these concerns shifted our attention towards production and aesthetic qualities and away from critical analysis of the aesthetic representations.

Perhaps bypassing a formal event, like a film festival, at the conclusion of the program could create more opportunities to deconstruct visual representations. Had the experience with producing *Step Back, Move Ahead* been less rushed, or if students had been able to discuss the film in other classroom contexts, we could have engaged in discussions about representations of gender in the film during production and post-production processes, rather than simply after the film was complete. Had we structured adequate time, or thought more deeply about process and product negotiations, we could have found space for group screenings of footage and discussed questions such as *What gender discourses are supported? How might this text perpetuate heterosexism? How does this comment take gender and heteronormativity for granted?* Even when projects are finished, educators still have great opportunities to challenge discourses that structure texts. Teachers and students can explore how the narrative and visual representations might perpetuate hateful notions or inequitable discourses, and generate ideas about what could be done differently next time. In a program focused on social justice, time must be devoted to critical reflection on video products.

Finally, this analysis demonstrates the value of critical literacies and social justice education in school curriculum, which is currently a significant gap in educational discourse and practice. Without such skills and understandings, students will likely reproduce oppressive discourses, as was the tendency in *What's up Doc?* films. Some critical discourses, while subtle and insufficiently nourished, are highlighted in the curriculum document that

influenced the *What's up Doc?* program. The document, *The Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum* (New Brunswick Department of Education, 1998, p. 134), recommends that literacy programming should encourage students to “explore, respond to, and appreciate the power of language, literature, and other texts, and the contexts in which language is used.” In this way, concepts of power and the social implications of language are given some focus. Critical perspectives are also highlighted when the document tasks teachers to have students “respond critically to complex print and media texts” by exploring “the diverse ways in which texts reveal and produce ideologies, identities, and positions” (p. 30). Although these words provide space to explore critical themes, explicit reference to critical social theories (e.g., feminist, queer, anti-racist, Marxist, dis/ability theories) are completely omitted. This means that the theoretical tools that students and teachers need to engage in critical media analysis are obscured. Including curriculum outcomes that focus on critical media literacy explicitly informed by feminist, Marxist, queer, anti-racist, post-colonial, and dis/ability theories might better educate students and teachers about how all media texts are structured by discourse and power. Furthermore, in the context of participatory media projects like the *What's up Doc?* program, the inclusion of specific critical theories in the curriculum might encourage students to be more attuned to how power operates within their own media projects and better equip students and teachers to edit or amend their work to make stronger, more inclusive arguments for equity and social justice.

This analysis has expanded understandings of the limits and possibilities of critical participatory video projects with youth. The fact that marginalizing and oppressive discourses structured *What's up Doc?* films affirms Loisel's (2007) view that video work with youth can foster counter-hegemonic discourses but, at the same time, reinscribe oppressive power relations. This contradiction reminds critical practitioners, like myself, to temper celebratory assumptions and proceed reflexively when engaging with this praxis. The analysis here provides important reminders and examples of how power and institutional and discursive contexts shape and constrain critical pedagogy programs like *What's up Doc?* It also shows the importance of being attentive to how these initiatives may contribute to the marginalization of the students involved and draws attention to the importance of being constantly vigilant in challenging marginalizing discourses that may surface in the context of critical pedagogy initiatives. It also highlights the importance of developing new critical literacy strategies designed to enable students and teachers to explore how social conditions, issues, and perceived realities are connected to power structures.

Participatory critical filmmaking pedagogies can be productive tools in educational projects for social justice. However, reflecting on the *What's up Doc?* program suggests that these pedagogies are complex, ethically intricate, implicated in school power relations, and filled with tension. I hope this discussion has contributed to the growing chorus of critical voices in the field

of participatory video making. Like Low, Brushwood Rose, Salvio and Palacios (2012), Mookerjea (2010), and Shaw (2012), I agree that it is important to trouble romantic, celebratory, and non-critical constructions of these approaches. Participatory video, on its own, will not bring about youth empowerment; that can only be maximized if the practice is part of broader, critically reflective projects for social justice (Plush, 2012; Rogers, 2016; Walsh, 2012).

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