

# *The Bohemian Curriculum: Expanding Consciousness, Evolving Culture*

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Uncensored discourse and creative exchange in cafés of fringe villages. Gathered to critique cliché and redefine conventions. Blue smoke circles as this community of minds turns coffee into brandy, dialogue into poetry, fiddle playing into soapbox pontification. Each addicted to the space—a *ménage à trois* of culture, ideas, and selfhood. Outsiders look through bay windows of crown glass, which distort—disobedient, disdain, demimonde. Their art is too artsy, fashion too vogue, and ideals unorthodox. Their style is seemingly insensible and they knit—scarves, clothes, textures, religions, philosophies, cultures. An eccentric, eclectic sociality. Their beat, counterpoint to corporate rhythm, out-of-step with normal time. Their politics are anti-, and their purpose is creation.

Descriptions of bohemian identity and culture are vast: from Murger's *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* (1849) to Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896) through to modern day stage interpretations such as *Rent*, epitomized in writings of the Bloomsbury Group and paintings of Edvard Munch, Picasso, and many others (Gluck, 2000). Even today, representations of bohemianism are pervasive in mass culture (Wilson, 1999). The

bohemian is far from a historical character. However, according to Kreuzer (1986), impressions of bohemians vary widely from those positive connotations of trendsetters and revolutionaries to the negative impressions associated with disobedience, danger, and disease (as cited in Wilson, 1999).<sup>1</sup> The popularized bohemian identity is of individuals engaged in an ambivalent relationship between Western commercialism and corporate values and a community of artistic radicals who defined themselves through an alternative lifestyle. Typically, bohemians are seen as 'outsiders', opposed to and in rebellion against mainstream culture. From this perspective, Bohemians are not only cast at the bottom of a hierarchical class structure but also set peripherally to society's conventional cultural framework. As such, the bohemian has become a "figure whose role is to explore marginal states of being and consciousness, and who challenged the limits of individual and social existence" (Siegel, 1986, p. 13). However, this lifestyle is riddled with tribulation; their marginal actions lead to social exclusion, ostracism, and silencing. Despite these conditions, bohemians persist in a plight to occupy the fringe of existence and to push on the bounds of normal ways of being. Hence bohemianism is not only a physical way of living but more a consciously cultural state of mind (Stover, 2004).

Conceptually, bohemianism provides the basis for the majority of subcultural movements including those of punk rock, hippie, edge, and the more contemporary emo. In this paper, I look deeper at bohemianism in an effort to explore the rudimentary characteristics of such countercultures. Given the liberal-conservative framework that dominates Western politics, economics, and culture, this exploration is necessary in order to move toward a more inclusive and integrated understanding of what it means to live in and with diversity. Through this work, I aim not to present just another countercultural theory but rather, to present a framework for thinking about individual diversity that opens a space for bridging subcultural groups.

In this article, I use bohemianism to explore the process of individual identity construction as always delimited by mainstream culture. In alignment with previous scholars (e.g., Donald, 2001; Fish, 1976; Foucault, 1969), I delineate a theory of cultural association that positions the individual within multiple nested and overlapping cultures where identity and self-narrative are defined only in relation to cultural normativities. Central to this argument is the notion that individual identity is limited to culturally accepted forms of existence with little space for individual authorship of self-narratives. This argument is constructed at the nexus of cultural dogmatization and the domain of individual self-formation, and serves to expand the possibilities of social and personal experience, pushing consciousness towards new positions of complexity. Bohemianism exemplifies this process, providing a case in which individuals have challenged normative rhetoric and have rewritten and authenticated their narratives. The intention of this argument is not to parse-out subgroups that exist nested within broader cultural associations but rather to accept and engender individual difference from cultural normativities. Further, the recognition that bohemians publicly express and celebrate their individualism exemplifies a mechanism for the evolution of culture. Drawing upon lessons learned from bohemianism, this paper concludes with an explicit link to education, implicating curriculum with the responsibility of creating classrooms that encourage interrogation of cultural normativities and that provide space for the rewriting of self-narratives and the creative expression of self.

### Individual-Cultural Relationship

Central to any analysis of bohemianism is the association between mainstream culture and the individual. Necessary for such analysis is a theoretical delineation on the structure of culture and its relationship to

the construction of individual identity. I draw upon two interrelated properties derived from bohemian case studies to develop my view of this relationship. First, I assert that individual identity construction is dependent upon a norm group where individuals are defined through their relationship with mainstream culture (Foucault, 1969). For the purposes of this argument, mainstream is understood as the dominant cultural group in which the majority of its membership subscribes to a set of normativities—commonly accepted paradigms, beliefs, laws, and attitudes about the world and human existence. Second, individuals exist within multiple cultures at any given time, where the concept of culture refers to various collective identities including (but not limited to) race, nationality, social class, sexuality, ability, interest, and geographic or cyber/virtual communities. These cultural groups may be nested within one another and overlapping (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000). Accordingly, this theoretical framework implies that identity is defined by an individual's membership within various collective groupings and positioned in relation to normative, mainstream criteria.

The first property in this framework of culture, namely that individual identity is constructed in relation to a norm group (Foucault, 1969), is fundamental to the bohemian relationship with mainstream culture. Foucault observes that an individual's subjectivity is at the whim of culture, which shapes one's thoughts, actions, and reactions. While some portrayals depict a bohemian as fully independent and against mainstream culture, in reality, the bohemian was a modern social character whose activities were defined by the commercial marketplace and social hierarchy (Gluck, 2000). In order to express a character in opposition to the mainstream, the bohemian must, in part, identify with the activities and ideologies of mainstream culture. Bohemians can only exist in relation to a normative lifestyle. Klaus Mann wrote, "unending and involved is the flux of attraction and repulsion between those two opposite characters, bohemian and bourgeois, constantly irritating and

enchanting, missing and desiring each other ... Eros floats between them, disguised as envy or scorn or admiration" (as cited in Mann, 1984, p. 11). This dance between fringe and mainstream, taboo and acceptable, deviance and compliance, is ubiquitous among bohemian figures.

To provide an example of this relationship, I briefly examine activities of the Bloomsbury Group. While the exact parameters of the group are somewhat ambiguous (i.e., dates, membership, formality), Bloomsbury is generally accepted as a group of artists, writers, and thinkers who gathered in London in the early half of the twentieth century. The Bloomsbury Group, paralleled by other bohemian parties in Paris and later in New York, was at the frontier of post-modernism, pioneers of new ways of thinking and being. Christy Burns (2002) characterized this period as:

A trajectory of critiques—feminist, post-colonial, and Marxist—culminated in an intensive scrutiny of modernism's politics. The politics of representation, the politics of style, questions about sexuality, the emergence of queer theory and gender studies, and a full embrace of (post)colonial critique—all served to change the face of modernism, throwing previously held beliefs and narratives into doubt. This was, in a sense, an appropriate modernist impulse, arising from fragmented aspects of culture, emphasizing differences in the field rather than unity, and questioning more traditional approaches and ideologies (p. 470).

The quadrangle marking the block of Gordon Square housed the meetings of the Bloomsbury Group. These meetings were declared by Vanessa Bell in her memoir as being "all free, all beginning life in new surroundings, without elders to whom we had to account in any way for

our doings or behaviour, and this was not then common in a mixed company of our class" (Rosenbaum, 1995, p. 106). By recognizing their position in relation to cultural expectations (i.e., elders and company of class), the members of Bloomsbury were able to challenge the limitations of such existence. Freedom was a right of supreme importance in this group as embodied through free speech and iconoclastic ethos, and, according to Vanessa Bell, characterized by a "great honesty of mind" (Rosenbaum, 1995, p. 108). Composed of figures such as Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Roger Fry, Clive Bell and Lytton Strachey, the individuals of Bloomsbury represented and explored shifting identities and celebrated such an existence through art, poetry, fiction, and critiques. Robert Poole (1989) argues that it was the link between their "leftishness" and "unconventionality" with their "basic common sense notions of culture, art, and reason" that made their work successful (though controversial at times) among the mainstream (p. 965). They bridged contemporary politics and values with an undercurrent of alternative views, which existed in outside cultures but which also held intrigue to individuals of the mainstream.

I now draw upon two specific cases from the Bloomsbury Group to highlight the role of mainstream culture in the formation of identity. These two cases include Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist Exhibitions of 1910-1912 and his Omega Workshop along with the Woolfs' Hogarth Press and its associated published works. Roger Fry, a late addition to the Bloomsbury Group, widened the group's expression of post-modern thought through the introduction of artistic critique.

In 1910, Fry staged the Post-Impressionist Exhibitions at the Grafton Gallery that emphasized a socialistic perspective based predominately on French paintings and drawings (Egbert, 1967). The series of exhibitions raised animosity between the British upper class and the contemporary art community as the exhibitions were staged in the wake of Pope Pius X's *Lamentabili Sane* that asserted the errors of modernism

and condemned 65 works of modernist writers, claiming they were a synthesis of all heresies. In addition, the exhibitions were opened after the death of King Edward VII, an event that called for a re-emphasis on patriarchal allegiance. Nonetheless, Fry continued his pursuit to liberate art (and artists) from Victorian subversion of modernity.

Fry wanted to bring modern forms of art into daily life, into the homes of those that could not afford high art. He wanted art accessible, envisioning common people as artists rather than commissioned professionals. Linked to this vision was providing young local artists the opportunity to pursue their trade. Of particular importance to Fry was the economic status (and thus social status) of artists within the English class structure (Egbert, 1967). Fry recognized that low wages for artwork forced many talented artists to seek work in other areas because they simply could not afford to produce their art. In addition, Fry noted that this structure did a gross disservice to the field of applied art by withholding a new aesthetic, a “new sense of rhythm and color” (Spalding, 2005, p. 54).

In an effort to counter the economic limitations of an artist’s life and encourage art as an activity for all, Fry opened the Omega Workshop in 1913. The Workshop provided a space where artists and ‘non-artists’ could produce and sell their art. To sustain the Omega Workshop within the capitalist society, the artists began painting on furniture and textiles, decorating tables, chairs, pots, pillows, and hats, selling their work, making it public and usable (Bell, 2001). Fry’s vision of ‘art in use’ and ‘art in life’ was actualized. Through the Omega Workshop, Fry defined his character and identity by making public his vision for art, a vision only possible when placed against that of the mainstream. The Omega Workshop opened opportunities for individuals to explore their talents, creating and adding to culture. In legacy, the Post-Impressionist Exhibitions and the Omega Workshop pushed the limits of culturally

accepted forms of existence defining new terrain for the human experience.

A second case to demonstrate the relationship between identity construction and mainstream culture is that of the Hogarth Press. In 1917, with one printing machine, Virginia and Leonard Woolf started the Hogarth Press in the dining room of their London flat. It originally started as a hobby, a means to print some of Virginia's poems and short stories. However, interest grew in the Press by other members of Bloomsbury, with Virginia and Leonard responding favourably. The Press held much appeal to modernist writers, as it was an open press that published uncensored texts. Unlike other publishing companies, works were not selected based on their marketability. Despite the success of the Press, the Woolfs remained committed to democratic socialistic ideals and never published for purely commercial reasons (Spalding, 2005). Instead, they sought works that were creative, expressive of diverse human experiences, and that shed light on social structures. There were few boundaries to what they published, with topics ranging from politics to psychoanalysis from economics to poetry (Bradshaw, 2002).

The tenor of the Press was that of Bloomsbury: freedom of speech and honesty of mind. It filled a niche that was unmet by mainstream press companies, offering a space for writers to share their individual commentaries about the world, whether in narrative or scientific forms. While slow to start, the Hogarth Press developed into "one of the most enduring modes in English modernism of independent production for fiction, essays and poetry" (Brooker, 2004, p. 165). Printing works by Freud, Forster, Woolf, Fry, Eliot, Mansfield, and Middleton, the Press made a significant contribution to Victorian literature (Bradshaw, 2002). In addition, many of these works, which may have otherwise gone unpublished, are now revered as classical and seminal, continuing to shape the way individuals understand the world. The Press, as an

enterprise, juxtaposed against mainstream platforms, made public the identities of Bloomsbury and in itself represented the ideals of bohemians. Unlike many countercultures, the bohemian case of the Bloomsbury Group was well publicized, in part due to the high social status and wealth of many of its members. These individuals had access to resources that could advance their beliefs within a scale that appealed to broader audiences and members of society.

The avant-garde attributes of the above cases become evident only in light of the dominant traditional colonial culture in effect at the time. The activities of the Bloomsbury Group “undermined orthodox bourgeois, gendered and sexual constraints, in word as in deed, and it was in this revolt under the shadow of the Victorian patriarch that Bloomsbury declared its bohemianism” (Bradshaw, 2002, p. 167). In these cases, bohemians were defined in relation to cultural normativities and the mainstream. This inability to dichotomize bohemian and mainstream reveals how individual identity is dependent upon cultural norms and based on individuals’ existence within culture.

The second property of this cultural framework suggests that individuals exist as part of multiple cultures that are nested and overlapping. Given the complexity of our social network, each individual occupies a unique position amongst and within various cultures. Drawing upon the artistic notion of bricolage, I consider this unique position as one’s cultural bricolage. I use the term bricolage to signal the distinctive social-historical positioning that gives rise to an individual’s linkages to multiple cultural groups. These unique linkages yield a rearrangement of previous identities leading to new perspectives within a particular space and time (Baker, 2004). Such rearrangements provide a basis for an individual’s reading of the world or what Fish (1976) referred to as one’s interpretive community. Cultural communities support epistemological and ontological perspectives that enable meaning making and understanding (Fish, 1976). Further, an

individual's cultural bricolage provides the basis for social-constructivism and transgressivism, in which individuals shape one another's experiences, provoking living and learning within a domain of creativity and complexity (Davis et al., 2000).

To provide a deeper sense of how cultures can be nested and overlapping, I consider the cultural bricolage of Virginia Woolf through a brief exploration of her selected works and life. Several of Virginia Woolf's fictional pieces examined the relationship between self and culture and the extent that "our natures are determined by the accidents of gender, class and historical moment" (Briggs, 2000, p. 72), by one's social-historical positioning. Her fictional works provide a glimpse into Woolf's own membership within various cultures. Traditional English middle-class was depicted in *Jacob's Room* (1922) then again, after the Great War, in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In *Orlando* (1928), Woolf counters Victorian culture and tests the limits of conventions with respect to aesthetics, indulgence, sexuality, and traditional family lifestyle. This work has been recognized as part fiction and part non-fiction, implicating Woolf with personal experimentation in unconventional lifestyles.

Another key aspect of Woolf's cultural bricolage was her identification with (and subversion of) the role of female in society. Fortunately, due to her higher social positioning, Woolf was recognized within mainstream culture groups and could bring forward belief structures from the marginalized, female perspective. Woolf became recognized for giving a voice to the female identity and authenticating the diverse experiences of women through portrayals of vivid female characters. Existing within the nested and overlapping cultures of the English middle-class, women in a hierarchical society, and alternative sexualities, Virginia Woolf exemplifies the patchwork of cultures characteristic of one's cultural bricolage. Woolf herself recognized that her identity was not coherent with any one culture and that it was a

composite of multiple, dynamic, and shifting states of being: “We’re splinters and mosaics; not, as they used to hold, immaculate, monolithic, consistent wholes” (as cited in Sellers, 2000, p. 116). Further, it is my assertion that it was the eclecticism of her cultural bricolage that served as fertile ground for understanding her self-identity and which provided a source for her creative expressions.

A more current case to illuminate the notion of cultural bricolage is taken from the character of Roger Davis in the musical production of *Rent*. Written in 1996, *Rent* is a modern day interpretation of *La Bohème* setting bohemia in the East Village of New York City at the turn of the millennium. Roger is a twenty-something musician whose goal in life is to write one legendary song of glory before he dies. Having contracted HIV from his girlfriend prior to her suicide, Roger is left to make sense of his fleeting life. Working seems trivial but necessary within a culture where individuals are defined by what they own and where law is ‘eviction or pay’. Recognizing that the future is indeterminate and solace is only achieved through engagement with those who care about his existence, Roger bridges cultures as a means of defining himself in light of his circumstance. As such, Roger as a heterosexual HIV male, living in New York’s East Village and bound by payments of ‘rent’ identifies with the nested and overlapping cultures of heterosexual males, the HIV/AIDs community, contemporary bohemians, New Yorkers, and mainstream/corporate America.

The bohemian figures presented here provide grounds for a framework of culture that relates individual identity to culturally based normative structures and which situates the individual within multiple cultures. In the following section of this essay, I will explore the impact of one’s cultural bricolage on the construction of individual identity and the writing of self-narratives. In particular, I suggest that it is the interaction and specifically the dissonance between memberships in various cultural groups that challenges the individual to (re)define him

or herself to give rise to new patterns of activities of behaviour (Davis & Sumara, 2006). While how we act and what we think is largely dependent on culture, it is an individual's cultural bricolage that affords uniqueness and creativity in thought and action.

### Brokering Normativities, Rewriting Self-narratives

The qualia of an individual's consciousness are determined by an individual's cultural bricolage and relationship to normative social structures. "Culture shapes the vast undifferentiated semantic spaces of the individual brain. The brain takes on its self-identity in culture and is deeply affected in its actions by culturally formulated notions of selfhood" (Donald, 2001, p. 286). Cultural structures and normativities write on an individual's inner semantic notepad, providing a basis for the self-narratives that shape the possibilities and limitations of an individual's thoughts and actions. As self-narratives are defined in relation to cultural norms, an individual's limitations mirror those of his/her cultural associations. Only through an introduction of variance and diversity can individuals begin to see these limitations and decide whether or not they want to supersede them. Given the potential complexity of an individual's social framework, I assert that an individual's cultural bricolage provides a basis for examining an individual's limitations through a comparison of cultural normativities. When provided with a structure for brokering normativities, individuals may choose to rewrite self-narratives in ways that are more agentic and more authentic to their interests. As an example, I explore normativities related to sexuality and gender. Once again, bohemian identity provides a launch point for this discussion.

The tension between sexuality, gender, and culture was common terrain for many bohemian figures, with sexual exploration cited as a hallmark of bohemianism. Take Gautier's (1905) novel *Mademoiselle de*

*Maupin* as an example, which portrayed the life of Julie d'Aubigny. As a swordswoman, cross-dresser, and opera lead, Julie d'Aubigny represented a figure who blurred the normative lines of sexuality and gender. In his novel, Gautier described a love triangle between Maupin (character name of Julie d'Aubigny), d'Albert (a man), and Rosette (a woman). While the novel appealed to bohemian sensibilities it was also written for the dominant bourgeoisie culture. However, critics noted that it was troubling for the press and was taken as an example of taboo behaviour for Victorian culture (Gluck, 2000). Other representations of Maupin in operas and plays, while comedic at times, presented the figure at minimum as an identity that was separate and peripheral to accepted norms.

As with other cultural dimensions, understanding sexuality as a construct in relation to cultural norms is key. Queer theory<sup>2</sup> explicitly recognizes the relationship between sexual identity and culturally bound notions of sexuality. In mainstream Western culture, beliefs about orientation have been largely heterosexualized resulting in a culture that subscribes to hetero-normativities. As such, existing within this culture permits (and fosters) identities that are congruent with a heterosexual lifestyle, which not only includes opposite-sex partnerships but also the accompanying social and moral connotation. Sumara and Davis (1999) state: "[H]eteronormativity creates a language that is 'straight'. Living within heteronormative culture means learning to 'see' straight, to 'read' straight, to 'think' straight" (p. 202). As such, consideration of alternative sexual identities is highly improbable when one is steeped in heteronormative beliefs and has little exposure to other sexualities. Despite an individual's 'stirrings'<sup>3</sup>, inner self-narratives are not immune to these normativities (Sumara & Davis, 1999).

A primary purpose of queer theory is to identify and interpret heteronormative culture and to expand the concept of sexual normativity to include alternative identities. Consequently, acceptance of queer

theory enables divergence in thinking and being, and expands consciousness with respect to position of sexual existence. Sumara and Davis (1999) discuss this critical perspective:

It [queer theory] is also spurred by the desire to create more interesting forms for thinking. If we believe that all forms of expression are intimately connected, then we must come to agree that heteronormative structures are limiting. Interrupting heteronormativity, then, becomes an important way to broaden perception, to complexify cognition, and to amplify the imagination of learners (p. 202).

Discourse on sexual normativity and queer theory serves to challenge limiting cultural beliefs about sexuality and begins to articulate and validate new positions of existence.

As an individual who challenged normative beliefs about male sexuality through his creative works and life, Oscar Wilde provides an interesting case for interrupting heteronormativity. Prosecuted for 'indecent exposure' (i.e., homosexuality) in 1895, Wilde served to set precedent for accepted sexual behaviour within Victorian society through the ignominy of homosexual activity (Cohen, 1996). His trial should be "considered in the light of the Victorian bourgeoisie's larger efforts to legitimate certain limits for the sexual deployment of the male body" (Cohen, 1996, p. 159). In addition to allegations related to his private life, Wilde's work was also publicly scrutinized for its sexually deviant nature in reviews such as this of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

Mr. Wilde has again been writing stuff that were better unwritten and while 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' . . . is ingenious, interesting, full of cleverness, and plainly the

work of a man of letters, it is false art – for its interest is medico-legal; it is false to human nature – for its hero is a devil; it is false to morality – for it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health and sanity (Cohen, 1996, p. 161).

However, what is remarkable about the case of Oscar Wilde is that, despite the explicit attempts of culture to suppress Wilde's narrative, his work has become regarded as classic within Victorian literature. Under the guise of art and artistic expression, Wilde was able to transmit his sense of self, his understandings of cultural normativity, and his existence across cultures (sexual and otherwise) in ways that have led to new forms of existence and modern complexities of thought.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the exploration and expressiveness of early bohemians, such as Oscar Wilde, have been catalytic in deconstructing normativities and expanding culture.

Given that individuals exist across cultures, normative messages constantly bombard one's inner semantic space and get written into self-narratives. As such, our inner semantic space is like an unruly closet<sup>5</sup>, filled with cultural graffiti that has the potential to limit, oppress, and subjugate, unless individuals rewrite their self-narratives through a process of brokering normativities within safe, educational spaces. Characteristic to bohemian ideology is the redressing of cultural normativities by building upon, within, and between cultures to achieve new positions of existence. Housed in free-speech cafes and salons, early bohemians would meet to discuss the landscape of modernity (and even that of postmodernity). As an example, the Heterodoxy Club was a feminists group in New York's Greenwich Village in the early 1900s in which women would gather to talk of social differences and disbarment of injustices, political and conventional (Stansell, 2000). In this single-sex

space, women of Heterodoxy were free to challenge normative beliefs, a process which began to open their unruly closets. Most significantly, these women, “unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness” (Stansell, 2000, p. 291), gave a voice to their identities, even if only heard within the confines of the club. The founder of Heterodoxy, Marie Jenney stated, “We intended simply to be ourselves, not just our little female selves, but our whole, big, human selves” (Stansell, 2000, p. 90).

Sumara and Davis (1999) characterize the interrogation of normativities as a heterotropic process in which unaligned normativities are juxtaposed rendering an opportunity for new interpretation and new possibilities.<sup>6</sup> Heterodoxy served as a space for heterotopia, where women, individually and collectively, could juxtapose the norms of Victorian culture with aspects of their whole, big, human selves that could not be played-out within the Victorian mainstream. Heterodoxy provided a safe space to explore undisclosed (and unwritten) narratives, leading to new interpretations of their identities and new possibilities of self.

When individuals exist across cultures, normative messages from these various cultures either align or contradict one another. Both cases help define our sense of self. When normativities are similar, they are accepted wholesale and with little interrogation of their underlying assumptions. These normativities are seamlessly integrated into an individual’s self-narrative. But it was not the seamless integration of normativities that brought the women of Heterodoxy together. Rather it was the dissonance between normativities of Victorian culture and those held within feminist culture. When contradiction or dissonance arises between normativities, individuals are forced to become critical and question their beliefs, thoughts and actions. “When stories and ideas are juxtaposed, so that their meanings collide, they can shift our focus to new semantic spaces” (Donald, 2001, p. 294). When confronted with

incongruent normativities, reconciliation of beliefs requires brokerage. I use the concept of brokerage to help shed light on the heterotropic process of juxtaposing conflicting normativities. Etienne Wenger describes brokering as “the use of multimembership to transfer some element of one practice into another. . . . Brokers are able to make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and – if they are good brokers – open new possibilities for meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 109). Since the outcomes of brokering misaligned normativities can have severe implications (i.e., social, personal, political, etc.), brokering is a complex task that requires critical thought for resolution of conflicting interests.

Wenger ascribes the feeling of uprootedness to the activity of brokering because the individual is placed in a position that does not fully agree with either community. Thus the individual is left in a space that is neither fully integrated in culture nor fully independent of culture. While this space may seem unsettling for some, it can be regarded as a position of learning and meaning making. The women of Heterodoxy actively and consciously brokered normativities to arrive at new learning about their identities. In this way, these women were able to rewrite their self-narratives at least within the confines of the Club. By virtue of their participation within Heterodoxy culture, these women were uprooted from their mainstream existence, as they could no longer blindly subscribe to Victorian normativities. As such, they existed within a space between cultures, a space that enabled them to expand their consciousness and rewrite their narratives.

### A Civilization of Creative Minds

Motivated by our innate curiosity for understanding our existence in relation to our world, we engage with others in hopes to broker normativities and expand our consciousness. “We are culture-mongers,

driven by the very nature of our awareness to seek refuge and solace in community. We connect with and learn from others to a unique degree” (Donald, 2001, p. 253). However, communities are not static arenas; our cultural machine requires active and conscious participation by individuals in order to move forward. Human evolution depends on our ability to engage in a civilization of creative minds, where the source of creativity is our experience and our resulting narrative. “Novelty, creativity, change, learning – that is, evolutionary and cognitive events – can only arise when there are differences that enable and compel departure from established patterns” (Davis et al, 2000, p. 115). Therefore, only when individuals exist in between cultures, when cultural normativities are seamed together and torn apart, and when narratives are outwardly expressed, can difference give rise to evolution.

Expanded consciousness is of little value to society if it is not reflected back onto culture. Bohemians created opportunities to publicly express their narratives and understandings of self in relation to others. Just as their narratives were constructed from their association with mainstream culture, the expression of their narratives was played out in the mainstream and interpreted by mainstream people. By visually and semantically representing their perspectives and ideologies, they opened up new possibilities of existence within society and thus, contributed to cultural evolution.

The most obvious analysis of bohemian character documents the artistic, aesthetic, and stylistic nature of bohemian identity and its link to individual interpretations of mass culture. Mary Gluck (2000) views the bohemian as a “theatrical performer who reenacted and eventually reaestheticized the subversive forms of popular culture” (p. 353). As a means of asserting reinterpretations of normativities, bohemians tended towards artistic representations through writing, art, music, dress, and drama. However, creativity is by no means limited to artistic formats. Merlin Donald (2001) comments, “the most common way to bring

something into cultural awareness is to find the right symbol to express it publicly” (p. 287). Thus any symbolic representation that affects another individual’s consciousness contributes to cultural evolution. When symbolic representations are effective, they “release energy in specific places in the cognitive system and bring about unexpected fusions and fissions of meaning” (Donald, 2001, p. 287). Therefore, our creative expression has the power to deeply change the way we frame and understand our world.

Further, creative exchange is a recursive and elaborative process (i.e., akin to a positive feedback loop) in which our self-identity is defined through interactions and new constructions of meaning. “One’s sense of self, it is suggested, unfolds continuously through the recursive and reiterative processes of representing and interpreting one’s identity in relation to (and in distinction from) other forms – persons, objects, events, and so on” (Davis et al., 2000, p. 169). That is, our consciousness expands as it interacts in communities that enable creativity. The notion of recursiveness suggests that one person’s expression (i.e., representation of narrative) provides the basis for another’s exploration. Davis and Sumara also note, “[E]very stage in this process is an elaboration, and such elaborations can quickly give rise to unexpected forms and surprising complexities” (2006, p. 43). In this way, the creative expression of self-narratives within culture complexifies culture, leading to learning and social evolution. However, brokering normativities, rewriting narratives, and outward expressing self-narratives within dominant cultures are not easy tasks. These processes require teaching and experiences that allow for reflexivity, critique, and compassion within safe learning spaces; they require a bohemian pedagogy.

## Bohemian Pedagogy

Bohemianism has been presented here, in part, as a metaphor intended to call attention to the limitations of culture and the impact of normativities on an individual's ability to identify and express his/her self-narratives. Specifically, the concept of cultural bricolage provides a framework for understanding transgression of normativities toward more creative ways of being. Like bohemians, we all exist within nested and overlapping cultural groups, each of which has expectations of behaviour, conventions, and prescribed beliefs that influence perceptions. In order to expand consciousness, we must provide space for the brokering of differences and the authentication of self-narratives. Characteristic to bohemian identity and ideology was a definition of self through a response to normativities. Played up against a backdrop of mainstream culture, bohemians publicly expressed their self-narratives. Their artistic demonstrations pushed the boundaries of the acceptable, resulting in new positions of human existence and ultimately, the evolution of mainstream culture.

As learning about mainstream social norms and cultural expectations occurs through systems of education, both formal and informal, sites of education remain at the nexus of provoking a bohemian sensibility. Applied within systems and structures of education, understanding cultural nestedness and social influence challenges the system to teach beyond normalized and normalizing lessons. While school-based campaigns focused on equity, multiculturalism, and anti-discrimination of various minority groups are an initial step in promoting awareness of differences, they are only auxiliary efforts for what is a systemic dilemma. What is needed is a reorientation of curriculum, not an add-on campaign or extra unit of study dealing with self and society. What is needed is a fundamental paradigm shift that pervades across the system. This reorientation is not intended to displace the academic component in

education but rather to contextualize it within a humanistic and hermeneutic framework. In conclusion, I draw upon and utilize the bohemian metaphor once more as a means of characterizing this reorientation.

The bohemian curriculum calls on a pedagogy of criticism and critique but not that of pedantic, judgmental, or violent forms. Rather, it pulls on the thread that connects postmodern democratic and emancipatory theories, namely those of queer, feminist, and critical. This thread, which I term as an interpretive transgressive approach, challenges the value assumptions of the mainstream and situates learning in between cultures, focusing on the individual's position in relation to social normativities and self-narratives. This curriculum pushes beyond the status quo and blind acceptance of culture, favouring interrogation of identity. This process of brokering normativities will likely not be overtly coherent or necessarily linear, leading to periods of confusion and uncertainty. These states represent moments of transition and learning. Hence I believe that education must work against our instinct to resolve uncertainty and confusion, and instead work to create such points of inner dissonance. We must encourage teachers and students to traipse into the risky realm of the unknown, to teeter on the tightrope of uncertainty.

Bohemian pedagogy means that teaching should seek to create opportunities for students to map out their cultural bricolage and to broker (i.e., compare and contrast) the normativities that shape their self-narrative. It also means looking at other ways of being and introducing diversity, even if not already present in the class. It requires that time be given to the sharing of diversity and that some of the prescribed expectations of learning be let go and opened to the unknown, to the learning that occurs as a result of diversity. Finally, it means moving into an imaginative domain where students are given permission to live in ways different than the norms and that allows for the writing and re-

writing of self-narratives. Practically, a bohemian pedagogy involves dialogue, critique, and arts-based (broadly defined) learning strategies that allow for individual expression and the development of a community of creative learners. This anti-discriminatory exploration requires safe and compassionate classrooms that embrace unique learning at both individual and collective levels. Such an educative process will ultimately render new constructions of meaning, creative possibilities, and interesting positions of complexity.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kreuzer explains that “for some, the bohemian (good) was opposed to the bourgeois (bad); others set the true artist (good) against the bohemian (bad); a third distinction was between the ‘real’ bohemian (good) and the phony (bad)”.

<sup>2</sup> The term *Queer* as used in Queer Theory is not intended to denote a theory for or of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender individuals but rather to recognize the sexualized (in particular heterosexualized) nature of culture.

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘*stirrings*’ refers to sexual feelings as described in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*. The novel depicts a futuristic society in which stirrings are forbidden and treated with medication. Sumara and Davis (1999) used a group reading of *The Giver* as basis for their investigation of heteronormativity.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen argues that Wilde’s work should be considered as a complex cultural artifact and not only read as an ideological reflection of past culture but as an element in the production of our reality.

<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of an unruly closet was adapted from Sumara and Davis (1999).

<sup>6</sup> Sumara and Davis base their notion of a heterotropic process on the description provided by Michel Foucault, *The order of things* (1973).

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