



PERSONNE TÉMOIN



MÉDIA

To discuss ethical principles, participants took inspiration from hats representing various perspectives on the co-production of public testimonials



PUBLIC

## Addressing ethical issues within testimonial cultures

### Workshop series allows exploration of definitions, challenges

Some twenty people gathered at UQAM on June 17 to discuss the many ethical issues that criss-cross the *Testimonial Cultures* project. Participants from a number of organizations were in attendance: COCQ-SIDA, GRIS-Montréal, PolitiQ, Stella, Aide aux transsexuels et transsexuelles du Québec (ATQ), COHDS, Concordia University, University of Ottawa, and UQAM.

The day began with a workshop aimed at developing a shared understanding of ethics applicable to various stances with regards to public

testimonials and their co-production in the context of research, social work, public education, and media coverage. Participants were asked to outline key ethical principles, taking inspiration from a small collection of hats (fedora, bicycle helmet, cowboy hat, etc.) representing different roles (people who give testimonials, community groups, journalists, researchers, etc.) that project partners may find themselves taking on.

This was followed by a round table discussion in which participants identi-

fied ethical challenges they had faced in the context of their testimonial experiences and practices. A range of issues were discussed including factors that can enhance or limit the diversity of people who give testimonials, challenges associated with the implementation of a principle of "shared authority," and the importance of reducing the risks associated with putting a personal story into public circulation. Differences in perspective were also examined such as whether or not protecting confidentiality (*continued, p. 2*)

## VIHsibilité (2000-2012) and Sex Work

### Two new compilations of video testimonials

We have recently launched two brand new compilations of video testimonials that we expect to be useful in supporting a range of educational, training, and advocacy activities.

*Sex Work* illustrates various ways in which testimonials have been used since 1981 by people with an experience in sex work, while *VIHsibilité (2000-2012)* presents

testimonials from 2000 to 2012 by people living with HIV.

Launch events were held in Montreal on May 18 and subsequently in Victoria, B.C. on June 6 in collaboration with AIDS Vancouver Island and in Vancouver on June 8 in collaboration with Pivot Legal Society.

Screenings of the compilations at the launch

events were followed by discussion periods in which special guests and audience members shared their views on the personal and social importance and impact of video testimonials.

A DVD copy of one or both of the compilations can be obtained free of charge by sending in the order form available at [testimonialcultures.ca](http://testimonialcultures.ca) ■



Thomas Waugh and Maria Nengeh Mensah co-hosted the launch event held in Montreal (photo: Marie-Ève Gauvin)

No. 9

July 2013

### Upcoming activities

The next meetings of the **General Assembly**, the **Working Committees** and the **Executive Committee** will be held in September or October.

Doodle surveys will be sent out to project partners and committee members to confirm the dates and times of these meetings.

Please check your emails for further updates and in the meantime, **have a great summer!**

### In this issue

Committee meetings	2
Project website coming soon	2
Study Day report comes out	2
Exhibition project: next steps	3
Blogs as testimonials	3
Invitation to meet with journalism students	3
Staff news	4

should take priority over encouraging more people to speak out in public about their experiences.

The objective of the final workshop of the day was to provide guidelines for the development of an upcoming public exhibition project. Participants were asked to come up with key messages they felt should be communicated

in the context of this exhibition, as well as messages that should absolutely be avoided. Prior to being shared with the group, these ideas were jotted down on cards that were placed, symbolically, in either a flower pot or a small garbage bin.

Workshop discussions were very fruitful thanks to the active participation of those in

attendance. A summary of the key points raised over the course of the day will be prepared to serve as a guide for future activities. An article examining the ethical and political challenges that characterize the *Testimonial Cultures* project is also being planned. ■



**Some of the personal items brought to the study day in November 2012 that participants felt were symbolic of their testimonial experiences**

(photos: Marie-Ève Gauvin)



## Committee meetings and updates on project activities

### General Assembly

(June 17): An overview of activities undertaken since January and an update on the project work plan were presented. To move forward with plans for an exhibition on testimonials, a research assistant will be hired this summer and a working committee will be set up in the coming months. Members of the assembly are invited to identify people from their groups who would be interested in serving on this committee.

A funding proposal for the exhibition project will be prepared this fall and to this end, members are also invited to identify potential partners and contributors by adding their suggestions to a preliminary list that will be sent out shortly. The next meeting will be held in September or October.

### Working committee on testimonials by people with an experience in sex work

(June 17): Following an update on the activities of the past few months, the committee discussed the work that will be undertaken over the coming year. Priorities include distribution of the compilation of video testimonials, devel-

opment of training activities, and participation in the planning of the exhibition project.

The committee developed a preliminary list of potential partners and contributors to be contacted during preparation of the upcoming funding proposal. The next meeting will take place this fall.

### Project website coming soon

We are pleased to announce that work on the website for the *Testimonial Cultures* project is nearing completion and the site will be going live in the fall of 2013.

Fully bilingual (English and French), the website will provide information about project partners, activities, and publications and offer a dynamic platform to support the development of new initiatives such as the exhibition project. A temporary page can already be found at [culturesdutemoignage.ca](http://culturesdutemoignage.ca) and [testimonialcultures.ca](http://testimonialcultures.ca)

Preparation of web site content is currently underway and we invite you to share your ideas and contributions (texts, quotations, photos, videos, etc.) by contacting

us at [culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com](mailto:culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com)

### Study day report comes out

In November 2012, 48 individuals from a range of community, institutional, artistic, and media settings came together for a study day held in Montreal entitled "Convergence and Diversity" to discuss their opinions and experiences with regards to giving testimonials in various contexts of production and distribution.

A report is now available in French and English that contains summaries of workshop and plenary discussions and a synopsis of comments made by three panelists at the end of the day. The report also contains a photo album of personal items that participants felt were symbolic of their testimonial experiences and that were brought to the study day and discussed during a collective interpretation activity. The report will be emailed to participants in the next few weeks.

To obtain a PDF copy, write to [culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com](mailto:culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com) ■

## Exhibition project on testimonials: next steps

Based on discussions and consultations undertaken over the past year, the *Testimonial Cultures* team is moving forward with development of a public exhibition that will showcase and disseminate the results of our project.

We are aiming to mount the exhibition in 2015-2016 but the format, location, and exact dates have yet to be determined. The exhibition's

main theme will be the use of testimonials as a strategy of social intervention by people who identify as LGBTQI, who are living with HIV, or who have an experience in sex work. Given that this is a politically charged topic (in the context of discrimination, invisibility, taboos, legal issues, etc.), the main challenges will include how to present differing and even opposing points of view and how to examine

sensitive topics in an accessible manner that encourages public reflection.

Development of the project is being coordinated by **Alain Ayotte**, who will undertake some initial research over the summer and present a preliminary concept for the exhibition to project partners this fall in order to guide the preparation of a funding application. ■

## Blogs as testimonials: *Talk to the Hump*

If you're just hearing about Ken Monteith's blogs for the first time, you're in for a real treat!

Citizen blogger *extraordinaire* (in addition to his role as COCQ-SIDA's executive director), Monteith has been amusing and educating readers since 2006 via his colourful and irreverent blog, *Talk to the Hump*. In 2010, he also became Montreal correspondent for *Positive Lite.com* and he has published in a range of other venues including the blog for COCQ-SIDA's current awareness campaign, *Je suis séropositif*.

In a recent posting, Monteith notes: "I'm HIV positive. I'm not ashamed of this, and I don't want to hide the fact that this is part of my daily life." While not everyone is in a position to maintain a public profile in this manner and Monteith is careful to recognize this, blogging can nonetheless be a powerful tool to educate and advocate against HIV-related stigma as well as the discrimination faced more generally by sexual and gender minorities.

Even as he strongly defends the right for people to choose whether to go public about their HIV-positive status or

keep this information private, Monteith is also a strong promoter of the idea that the social visibility of HIV must be increased. Keeping a blog, he maintains, is one of the best ways to break down prejudices.

Far from being repetitive or dry, he carries out this serious and important work in an entertaining way, helped along by personal observations on popular culture and liberal doses of eye-candy. His skill at tackling and making sense of difficult topics is perhaps only outmatched by his wry humour and keen eye for all that is quirky and offbeat. ■

## Invitation to meet with journalism students

Have you been interviewed by a reporter about your experience as a person who identifies as LGBTQI, a person living with HIV, or a person with an experience in sex work? Not sure whether you were happy with the outcome? Interested in sharing your point of view?

We are looking for resource people to participate in a dis-

cussion with students from UQAM's School of Media as part of a university course taught by Chantal Francoeur, former journalist with Radio-Canada. To participate, you will need to have participated in a media interview on at least one occasion and have an understanding of the role and limitations of journalists and the conditions under

which they work. The aim of the discussion will be to go beyond "stereotypical" debates about media coverage to allow for a more in-depth exchange with regards to testimonial practices, journalistic practices, and ethical issues.

For more information, write to [culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com](mailto:culturesdutemoignage@gmail.com) ■



**POSITIVE LITE.COM**  
Canada's Online HIV Magazine

**From top to bottom:**  
Ken Monteith; masthead from his blog "*Talk to the Hump*"; logo for the online magazine *Positive Lite.com*

Check out Monteith's work at the following links:

<http://talktothehump.blogspot.ca>

[positivelite.com/by-author/editorial-authors/ken-monteith](http://positivelite.com/by-author/editorial-authors/ken-monteith)

[jesuisseropo.org/a-labri-de-lacceptation-sociale-de-la-seropositivite/](http://jesuisseropo.org/a-labri-de-lacceptation-sociale-de-la-seropositivite/)



Cultures du témoignage | Testimonial Cultures

*A cultural study of testimonials as a social intervention strategy for sexual and gender minorities: applications, challenges, issues, and impact of a renewed practice* ("Testimonial Cultures")

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contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA)  
Groupe de recherche et d'intervention  
sociale (GRIS-MONTREAL)  
PolitiQ – Queer solidaires de Montréal  
Stella, l'amie de Maimie

#### Institutional partners:

Institut de recherches et d'études  
féministes de l'UQAM  
Centre d'histoire orale et de récits  
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**Research Staff:** Alain Ayotte, Maryka Henry, Véronique Leduc

#### Newsletter editorial team:

Thomas Haig  
Maryka Henry  
Maria Nengeh Mensah

This project is made possible through financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

## Staff news

### A word of thanks

**Prostitutes of Ottawa / Gatineau Work, Educate, Resist (POWER)** has decided to withdraw from its role as a community partner on the project team. We thank the members of POWER for their contributions and wish all the best to the organization as it continues with its important work.

After working as coordinator for the VIHsibilité project over the past two years, **Marie-Eve Gauvin** completed her contract at the end of June. We would like to thank

Marie-Eve for her excellent work and strong commitment to the project and wish her every success with her future endeavours!



Marie-Ève Gauvin

### Congratulations!

**Maryka Henry** is on maternity leave from her position as research

assistant. We hope that the coming months will be filled with happiness and health for Maryka, her partner, and the new members of their family, Clémence and Flavie, and we look forward to seeing Maryka again soon!

Congratulations to **Janik Bastien-Charlebois**, who was awarded the medal of the Quebec National Assembly at the end of May in recognition of her many contributions as a researcher and community volunteer. Bravo, Janik! ■

## Have you given a public testimonial?

(media, presentation, artistic creation, etc.)

### as a member of a sexual or gender minority

(e.g. a person who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, two-spirited, intersex)

AND / OR

### as a person with an experience in sex work

*Did you enjoy your experience or did you find that it left something to be desired?*

### You are invited to participate in a research interview

with the aim of better understanding the experience of people who have given testimonials. Our study will provide information on ways to reduce stigmatization.

For more information or to indicate your interest in participating:

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