

Amber Burkhart

About Pedro's Time

INTRO

The fall project "Pedro's Time" combined Pedro Flores' personal video diaries with interview footage to create a 6.5 minute film (Video 1). In Video 1, Pedro recounts his experience returning to the outside world after five years in prison. The video combines abolitionist philosophies with anti-racist, feminist allyship theories to subvert disempowering treatment of anthropological "subjects", especially former felons. Our goals are to provide a representation of an incarcerated person speaking on his own terms. This semester, I deepened my focus on ethical-representation. I developed a focus on feminist, anti-racist solidarity, and I experimented with the power of mediums. Together, Pedro and I created a more detailed and expansive video, hoping that viewers will have more opportunity to understand Pedro, his story, and the Prison Industrial Complex. We added another narrative detailing our story, and diverted farther from standard documentary format toward a more personal, transparent story.

BACKGROUND

Pedro and I don't share similar lifestories. He's 33, and he's a Hispanic man raised by working-class parents in southern California. He spent 5 years in prison. I'm a white, middle-class, queer, 23-year-old college student. We do share some things. We share a desire to talk and listen, we try to be kind, value honesty, and value all that we've learned from people different from ourselves. We also share our friendship.

Pedro and I met in an "inside-out" class. Along with two other incarcerated students, we applied for a grant to make this video. We won. When Pedro got out of prison just over a year ago, he reached out about the video, and he has been filming video diaries ever since. We made the video-making process collaborative. We conducted a series of interviews, and started to regularly meet in person, talk on the phone and Facetime to edit and produce the video.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

In fall, I finished my project within the intended timeframe. Spring semester was messier, as I made mistakes, learned from those mistakes, and found ways to support myself and my friendship/collaborative allyship with Pedro. My plan for this semester's video was to use already-existing footage (both his video diaries, and interview footage of him) to extend the story line beyond Video 1. I expected to include more from our interviews, namely details about Pedro's childhood, his experience with race and gender, and the many months (not just the first few weeks depicted in Video 1) he's had out of prison. I planned to incorporate an entirely new,

second story line to illustrate Pedro's agency in creating the video. At first, I wanted this story to focus only on him: My plan was to interview Pedro with questions about the video itself, rather than his experience. (Questions: Why did you want to make the video? Why did you want to record video diaries? How did this video project start?). However, we decided to add my presence into the video. I was hesitant to do this, but I realized that transparency of my presence with the video was a necessary part of feminist allyship.

We planned to finish filming by the end of March, and to wrap-up post-production by the end of April. But, there are still finishing touches. We are going to add a section covering where Pedro is now: Pedro is now living in his own house, working two jobs, and going to school. We may dive deeper into a prison abolition framework in exploring the high percentage of people who go back to prison shortly after release. This will be completed by the end of May.

THEORY

This project is an intentional attempt at feminist solidarity and allyship. A zine by PeerNetBC defines allyship as an ongoing process, beginning when "a person of privilege seeks to support a marginalized individual or group". They say allyship is about "building relationships based on trust, consistency and accountability with marginalized individuals or groups." I employed allyship inspired both by PeerNetBC's zine and Dr. Lynn Gehl (Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe)'s Ally Bill of Responsibilities, which lists a variety of strategies for allies. For me, allyship looked like remaining aware of my privilege and acting out of genuine interest and care. I listened to Pedro, and I learned. I held myself accountable to him in my consistent communication, hard-work, and creation of a video that tells the story that he wanted to tell. I practiced holding myself accountable to myself in setting healthy boundaries with my time with respect to this project.

Through the project, I sought to employ feminist methods- the goals of which Amy Hinterburg describes as "transforming power relations and improving the material conditions of people's lives" while remaining aware of what Hinterburg calls "the contradictory and difficult problems of representing the subjectivities and identities of 'others'". Speaking about and for others is an ineffective, unethical (in Hinterberg's words) attempt at allyship.

Thoughtfulness around representation was key in my process of video collaboration. According to Alcoff's *The Problem of Speaking for Others*, both speaking about and speaking for others is problematic, namely because these both engage in the act of representing others. Hinterburg says that "any feminist theory which involves either 'subject construction' (or 'object formation') involves representation and therefore cannot be separated from power inequalities." Interviewing Pedro directly addresses the issue of speaking about/for, because he is speaking about himself. Pedro's video diaries also provided a less-moderated means for him to speak. But those two elements are not enough. In asking specific questions during our interviews, I moved

the conversation in particular directions. In post-production, I had a heavy hand in weeding through footage, and selecting only certain clips to share.

In my second semester, I learned from some of my first semester's mistakes regarding representation and speaking for. Because of Pedro's feedback, we incorporated our story into the video. That meant that I was onscreen, on display like Pedro. The video showed who I was, and that I played a major role in the creation of the video. This transparency didn't resolve the issue of speaking for Pedro: But it did make the process more transparent. Additionally, because we worked together more in the second semester, Pedro engaged more in the post-production process, so he chose what parts of his voice/our voices to display onscreen.

The medium is the message, and our message is personal. As Marshall McLuhan points out, the medium by which content is delivered has an impact in of itself. Our video foregrounds facetime and iphone footage. I argue that this medium has two major functions: It increases accessibility, and allows for a more personal relationship between audience and video subjects.

Iphone and facetime are mediums commonly used with close friends and family. They aren't often seen by external audiences. I hope that these formats will jar audiences, when they are confronted with Pedro in a more intimate, and thus humanized, light. I want viewers to feel disarmed by the intimacy that standard documentaries often shun. I hope for a turning inward, and a reflection on why sudden intimacy feels so uncomfortable, especially with respect to an incarcerated person. I think this will be especially effective with our intended audience: viewers who don't have personal experience with incarceration. This medium is also subversive. Its creation was accessible in ways that standard films are not. It was shot largely on iphones. Though digital divides persist, especially across countries, low-income people are able to access iphones and other smartphone technologies at exponential rates. By displaying a film made in a low-budget, accessible way in an elite academic environment, I hope to shift the media landscape; allowing for increased legitimization of more accessible modes of storytelling. This is especially true for videos- which are typically costly. The accessibility allowed for more effective allyship and collaboration between Pedro and myself. Pedro used the phone he already had, and I supplied a speaker and iphone tripod with our grant money. The medium allowed Pedro a comfortable, affordable, mobile platform to story-tell.

REFLECTION

The project was more difficult than expected. The anxiety of grappling with so much footage and the pressure I felt to create something I deemed adequate was oftentimes crippling. I learned a lot about the film making process. Pedro was my biggest support.

It took me a while to get support I needed from Pedro. In the fall semester, I was closed off. Through my experience as a queer, female-bodied person, I've grown weary of unwanted sexual advances and homophobia. I have fear around friendships with men, especially older men, especially those who I perceive as more conservative than me. With Pedro, at first I tread lightly and didn't share much about myself. Because of Pedro's honesty, vulnerability, and non-judgement, I have felt safe enough to share more of who I am.

As I struggled with the video, I increasingly asked Pedro for help. Through this communication, our collaborative process grew more reciprocal. I continued to bring him into the film-making process. We spent more time together in person and over the phone and we started editing in person and from afar more and more throughout the semester. I realized increasingly that collaboration takes responsibility on my end, because in some ways it felt easier for me not to consult, to put my head down and work alone. However, collaboration was the most rewarding part of the project.

CONCLUSION

Across gender, age-based, cultural, and regional lines, Pedro and I managed to practice honestly communicating and listening. I see how this is an act of justice. My stated intentions of the film are to humanize Pedro and grow in empathy. Thinly veiled was the fact that those were my intentions. The camera gave me a reason to pursue them. In hearing (and feeling) Pedro's stories, in experiencing his humanity, I continually develop deeper understandings of Pedro, and of the prison industrial complex and its expansive effects. The power of cross-cultural, justice-based projects was solidified for me, as was my understanding that I am just beginning to learn about responsible practices in collaborative projects in which parties are oppressed differently.

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