
I Had the Slime of My Life

No, I Never Felt This Way Before

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Abstract: Since its release in 2010, Ito et al.'s hanging out, messing around, and geeking out framework has been widely used to describe youth digital production on a variety of platforms from Facebook to YouTube. However, the recent influx of slime tutorials demands a new framework that incorporates maker practices, as through video production youth simultaneously make and document making. Our paper lays the groundwork toward a framework that accurately reflects the practices youth engage in while creating and producing slime videos; examines slime creators as a community of practice; and provides insight into the intersection between media production and maker practices.

The Year of Slime

Since late 2016 and 2017, slime has become a sensation on social media, as well as in online shops such as Etsy. Millions of videos on Instagram and YouTube show slime makers oozing, stretching, pulling, crunching, and mixing slime. Some attribute the popularity of slime to their ability to trigger therapeutic and relaxing feelings of autonomous sensory meridian relief (ASMR), another growing Internet media trend (Barratt & Davis, 2015; Sagner, 2017). It is also a pathway to youth entrepreneurship, with slime makers, often called *slimers*, selling slime to make money for new slime supplies, and in some cases turning their slime into big business, as is the case with “Slime Queen” Karina Garcia, who makes more than six figures a month from sponsorships on her slime videos and sales of her slime kits.

Instagram videos, limited to one minute in length, tend to focus on a first-person point of view of playing with slime and engaging with followers around questions such as “What’s a country you want to travel to?” YouTube videos allow slimers to make longer content in which they can describe their process through tutorials, play with the slime by themselves or with others on camera, and engage the audience with more content-specific prompts. These videos provide a space for youth to consume slime content and engage with slime makers. More significantly, the slime craze has sparked a new form of video production, in which YouTubers’ making becomes the critical core of the content.

Our research documents the process of the making, producing, and sharing youth engage in through slime production. Our work builds on Ito et al.’s (2010) theory of creative production and Brahm and Crowley’s (2017) definitions of maker practices, offering a new framework that accurately reflects the practices youth engage in while creating and producing slime videos.

Creative Production

In their foundational ethnographic research, Ito et al. (2010) describe youth engagement with creative production as a nonlinear fluid movement between the genres of hanging out (getting together and being together), messing around (characterized by experimentation and play), and geeking out (an intense commitment and engagement with media and technology). The flexibility and scope of the hanging out,

messing around, geeking out model can easily be applied to creative production, the imaginative and expressive work shaped by youth choices and available media (Lange & Ito, 2010, p. 245), in a wide range of media from Facebook to virtual gaming to YouTube. YouTube, a “networked public” (boyd, 2017; Ito et al., 2010), is an ideal platform for video producers as it allows creators the opportunity to engage in their hobby and connect with others “who have greater expertise than they do, and conversely, where they can mentor and develop leadership in relation to less experienced participants” (Ito et al, 2010, p. 20).

Slimers on YouTube follow much the path described in Ito et al.’s 2010 model. They begin by hanging out: They comment on other slime videos, they create profiles, and they begin to ask questions about recipes. Movements such as personalizing YouTube channels and publishing videos lie at the boundary between hanging out and messing around genres of participation (Ito et. al, 2010, p. 255). Slimers often take this first step by testing out recipes from peers’ videos or recipes found online. Personal media creation is “often a starting point for broadening media production into other forms, a transition between hanging out, friendship-driven genres of participation and messing around and geeking out” (p. 261). Moreover, this initial media creation serves as the “jumping-off point for entry into more challenging forms of creative production” (Lange & Ito, 2010, p. 261). Those slimers who “geek out” begin making their own slime recipes, creating their own unique video style and specialty (Lange & Ito, 2010, p. 268), and, in some cases, begin promoting and selling their own products.

What is unique about slime videos is that the creative production centers around documentation of making: They are testing recipes, tinkering around with various ingredients, adding to or correcting recipes, developing understanding of how ingredients work together to get a desired result, innovating on new ways to customize their recipes, and sharing this information with other slime makers.

This process is unlike so many other YouTube sensations as youth engage in scientific inquiry and elements of maker education, “characterized by interest-driven engagement in creative production at the crossroads and fringes of disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, art, and math” (Brahms & Wardrip, 2014). The slime craze lives at these same crossroads and fringes: Youth mess around with science and in turn produce media to share their unique recipes.

Beyond evidence of maker practices in their tinkering, there is evidence of a new media-engagement framework, where the documentation of the make is the critical content of the video. Where the hanging out, messing around, geeking out model shows how youth fluidly move from consumption to production practices, slime videos are an example of a integral midpoint in these practices—the documentation of the make. In slime videos, video producers are not only telling a story or communicating an idea, they are demonstrating—and documenting—maker practices as the content of the video. We see a new model as a result (see Figure 1).

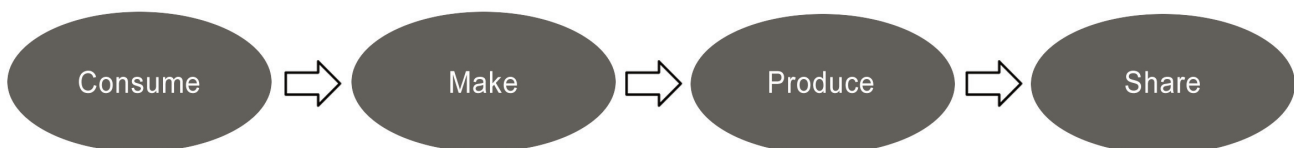


Figure 1. Model reflecting creative production witnessed in slime videos.

Maker Practices

Makers, or diverse groups who come together and are “motivated to learn with and from one another how to use and combine materials, tools, processes, and disciplinary practices in novel ways” (Brahms & Crowley, 2016) are part of a movement seen in formal and informal learning spaces, across classrooms, fab labs, makerspaces, and online spaces. Brahms and Crowley (2016) developed a set of definitions of maker practices based on article analysis of *MAKE* magazine, chosen not to solely represent making or makers, but as “a useful benchmark for identifying and characterizing the qualities and behaviors of this emerging community” (Brahms & Crowley, 2016, p. 2). Using one year’s worth of articles from *MAKE* magazine, their analysis revealed seven core learning practices associated with the makers in the *MAKE* magazine community: Explore and question; tinker, test, and iterate; seek out resources; hack and repurpose; combine and complexify; customize; and share (Brahms & Crowley, 2016). While Brahms and Crowley’s analysis was tailored for magazine articles, we found these maker practices to be common to other forms of making, including slime making.

To understand the intersection of creative production and maker practices, we draw on both to analyze slime makers’ YouTube videos through a lens of maker practices. Our work explores three research questions:

- What production practices are youth engaging in as they document the making of slime? What maker practices are youth engaging in as they make slime?
- How do slime videos exemplify an intersection between youth media production and maker practices?
- How do slime makers differ from “makers” of other mediums?

Methods

Data Collection

As there are millions of slime YouTube videos, we used purposeful sampling to ensure that the situation and participants would provide information most relevant to our research questions (Maxwell, 2013). We limited our case to YouTube slimers who have a strong following or dedicated slime channels and are among the top channels in a YouTube search for slime tutorials. Purposeful sampling creates the opportunity to obtain representativeness and typicality (Maxwell, 2013), which provides more confidence that conclusions are representative of the specific community.

For our preliminary study, we narrowed our search to four slimers who have been recognized in the slime community, who have documented the making of slime in at least two slime tutorial videos, who have at least 4,000 subscribers, and who have been creating YouTube videos for at least six months. To ensure that our four creators are representative of the larger slime community, we chose video creators of various ages and genders as well as videos made both by individuals and teams.

Data Analysis

We employed a mixed-methods approach to data analysis. While documenting the occurrences of maker

practices legitimized the making occurring in slime videos, we used qualitative analysis to champion the individual practices demonstrated in slime creators' videos.

We transcribed participants' videos and analyzed these videos using the maker practices Brahms and Crowley (2016) used to identify common practices found in *MAKE* magazine articles: Explore and question; tinker, test and reiterate; seek out resources; hack and repurpose; combine and complexify; customize; and share. Because of the difference in medium, and because the "make" was centered on one central idea, slime, rather than maker practices in general, it was necessary for us to adjust Brahms and Crowley's definitions of these practices to better match the content of these videos (see Table 1).

Maker Practices	Brahms & Crowley (2017) Definition	New Definition
Explore & Question	Interrogation of the material properties of the context in order to find inspiration or to determine intention for a process or project.	Interrogation of material properties used in slime production to find inspiration or intention for a process or project.
Tinker, Test, & Reiterate	Purposeful play, experimentation, evaluation, and refinement of context.	Purposeful play, experimentation, and evaluation of recipe.
Seek Out Resources	Identifying and pursuing the distributed expertise of others, includes recognition of one's own not-knowing and desire to learn.	Identifying and pursuing distributive expertise of others, including recognizing one's own not-knowing and acknowledging from whom or where one's inspiration originated. This often involves a "shout out" to other slime creators.
Hack & Repurpose	Harnessing and salvaging component parts of the made world to modify, enhance or create a product or process.	Reusing, incorporating or building from other recipes or slime creations to create a new product or purpose. This also involves acknowledging the inspiration for ideas or recipes.
Combine & Complexify	Developing skilled fluency with diverse tools and materials in order to reconfigure existing pieces and process and make new meaning.	Developing skilled fluency with scientific materials, trying new ingredients or comparing use of ingredients in different contexts to determine new processes and meaning.
Customize	Tailoring the features and functions of a technology to better suit personal interests and express identity.	Tailoring recipes to better suit personal interests and express identity. This includes tailoring slime recipes to feature unique colors/scents/add-ins chosen by the maker.
Share	Making information, methods, and modes of participation accessible and usable by members of the community.	Making information such as recipes available for other members of the community including specific prompts to the community for feedback as well as sharing and educating others through their making.

Table 1. Definitions of maker practices.

To determine the extent to which slimers engaged in the various maker practices, we used deductive coding based on our revised definitions and analyzed each video, counting the frequency of maker practices. We met regularly to interpret findings and to ensure for intercoder reliability (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, we examined the demographics of slimers. Because most of the slimers are youth, their exact ages are not known (for online privacy in some cases) but we can assume the makers of these videos are between 14 and 24 years old. This age range reflects the demographics of slime producers on YouTube. While youth as young as 6 have embraced the craze, the majority of slimers have been identified as “tweens” who identify as female (Carlyle, 2017; Lieberman, 2017; Sostek, 2017). Demographics such as race, socioeconomic status, and education level were not readily available.

Results

Our initial data suggest that slimers are engaging in a variety of maker practices throughout their 5–15-minute YouTube tutorials. Similar to Brahm and Crowley’s (2016) analysis of *MAKE* magazine, we found that videos contained several practices per video, suggesting that “the practices may be commonly part of a repertoire that characterizes making, or participation in the community of makers, as opposed to specialized practices that some makers use and others do not” (p. 4). All of the videos (100%) engaged in three practices: Tinker, test, and reiterate; seeking out resources; and sharing; and 75% of the videos engaged in exploring and questioning; hacking and repurposing; combining and complexifying; and customizing. For each maker practice, we identified an example from the video data to provide context for our new definitions (see Table 2).

Maker Community Practice	Percentage of Videos Exemplifying Practice	Number of maker practices per video
Explore & Question	75%	Video 1: 1 Video 2: 3 Video 3: 1 Video 4: 0
Tinker, Test, & Reiterate	100%	Video 1: 13 Video 2: 15 Video 3: 8 Video 4: 1
Seek Out Resources	100%	Video 1: 4 Video 2: 1 Video 3: 2 Video 4: 1
Hack & Repurpose	75%	Video 1: 6 Video 2: 6 Video 3: 1 Video 4: 0
Combine & Complexify	75%	Video 1: 0 Video 2: 3 Video 3: 2 Video 4: 1
Customize	75%	Video 1: 3 Video 2: 2 Video 3: 2 Video 4: 0
Share	100%	Video 1: 2 Video 2: 4 Video 3: 2 Video 4: 1

Table 2. Number of maker practices present in videos.

For each maker practice, we identified an example from the video data to provide context for our new definitions (see Table 3).

Maker Practices	Examples from Data
Explore & Question	"I think it's a lot easier to pour in your glue first and then add the color because if you have to try to add the color after you add your slime activator it might not take to the full like color. You see how green this is and how pink? See, show them."
Tinker, Test, & Reiterate	"I'm going to add a little bit of glue to yours a little bit more glue yeah just because to thicken it up some yeah. See, this is all trial and error. Just basically keep adding more of your slime activator and your glue and until you have the perfect consistency."
Seek Out Resources	"if you guys are like me any time you try to DIY something that's been done in a YouTube video it never quite turns out how it looked in the video, so that's why I'm going to be testing some of those popular slime recipes and letting you guys know which one's work and which ones don't!"
Hack & Repurpose	"And all the recipes that I will be trying today have two ingredients or less so they're super easy to make and you can find most of these ingredients in your house."
Combine & Complexify	"White glue works best to make smooth cloud slime but to make it pigmented you have to add a lot of pigment."
Customize	"This one is cool because you can get like any flavor you want so you can get any scent that you want essentially...be careful with this one because this one doesn't have any like fruit pieces in it but I know some of the other you'll play with do. I don't know how that would affect it."
Share	"We're going to have to do this again. For sure. If you have any slime ideas leave them in the comments below."

Table 3. Examples of maker practices witnessed in videos.

Tinkering, testing, and reiteration most often involved taking a recipe found online or from other YouTube videos, testing whether the recipe worked, and participating in a pattern of trial and error such as adding various amounts of ingredients. Tinkering, testing, and reiteration are the predominant maker practice witnessed in the video and reflect the iterative nature of maker practices: Makers try, fail, and try again and successful iterations provide “an opportunity to develop applicable skills and grow relative knowledge for oneself and for the community of makers” (Brahms & Crowley, 2016, p. 7).

We found that tinkering was often tied to seeking out resources as slimers mention or give a “shout out” to original recipe creators. While the process of sharing is woven into the mere practice of making and posting YouTube videos, slimers often encourage further sharing such as asking followers to provide input about the kinds of slime videos they would like to see next.

Exploring and questioning was interwoven throughout videos as slimers pondered how various properties would affect slime texture or consistency. Slimers are constantly hacking and repurposing household items to create new slime recipes or to find ways to replace toxic ingredients such as Borax

with safer ingredients. “Slime Queen” Karina Garcia has become famous for introducing recipes that include new and unusual items such as Hot Cheetos and coffee.

Most slimers customize slime recipes, adding glitter and paint of different colors or foods and household items that add auditory elements, but we also see slimers customizing their videos so that their videos stand out from the millions of other slime videos online. Perhaps the most sophisticated practice involves combining and complexifying as youth gain fluency with ingredients’ properties and are able to transfer that knowledge to create more complex products. As young creators learn more about the properties of activating agents such as Borax, they may begin to experiment with safer, less toxic materials such as laundry detergent or contact solution.

Discussion and Conclusions

Intersection of Practices

Slime creators work in the crossroads of media production and maker practices. They constantly engage in production techniques, weaving back and forth between messing around and geeking out. They continually produce and consume slime videos, seeking out inspiration from other members of their community. They repeatedly tinker around with materials, and they test hypotheses. They succeed and fail only to pick up and try again. This iterative process easily places the slime craze into the maker movement, but it does not answer the question of what it is about slime that has created this shift in production practices. The answer rests in the unique nature of the medium itself. Slime, unlike other moldable media—such as clay, Play-Doh, papier-mâché, or silly putty—is not meant to take a form. The final, malleable product is an experience. The art of slime is in the making of the slime itself.

Our preliminary data show that in the slime maker community, there is evidence of a new production model, in which an emphasis on making is at the core of media consumption, production, and sharing. Furthermore, slimers show evidence of engaging with maker practices, commonly seen as practices of fab labs and makerspaces. By reshaping definitions of maker practices with an eye toward the unique affordances and practices of YouTube and social media, we found that slime makers indeed engage in maker practices. Beyond maker practices, slimers engage in creative production, producing quality videos, and engaging their fans. The slime community stands in contrast to those who are often identified as makers in contexts such as *MAKE* magazine, with its own community of practice.

Slime “Community of Practice”

Brahms and Crowley generated their maker-practices definition based on the community of practice framework (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), which suggests a process of social learning in which learners participate in community practices to move from peripheral participation to mastery, with the assumption that makers belong to such a community of practice.

We work from the same assumption, that slimers belong to a community of practice, where newcomers move from consuming videos and learning how to make slime to becoming slime makers and experts with a following. We see evidence that slimers are learning from each other on YouTube and engaging in the practices of this particular community, both across social media practices (including things such as shout-outs, or encouraging comments or likes) and across production norms such as how slime is mixed

and played with in these videos. These practices of the slime community blend maker practices with the informal, friendship-based practices common to online socialization and personal media creation.

The participants in the slime community differ greatly from those who published the *MAKE* articles analyzed by Brahms and Crowley, a sample they describe as

a primarily adult, male, well-educated and affluent population of makers who, through wide distribution and esteem, have come to represent a broad movement of individuals whose ages, genders, educational aspirations and financial situations vary far more than those selected for representation in the pages of this publication. (2016, p. 2)

In contrast, of the initial sample of videos we reviewed, the makers were 83% female and ranged in age from 14 to 24 years old.

This informal community of practice around slime is exciting because this diverse group is employing maker practices found in other disciplines, but leveraged in new ways. This particular form of making and sharing leverages youth media practices and trends to create an interesting example of how youth learn, create, and share with one another in participatory spaces.

Future Directions

To further explore the unique properties of slime production, we will analyze up to 30 additional slime videos using the same deductive codes. We will expand our sampling size to include new, novice slime makers, as well as a larger variety of ages, genders, and race/ethnicities to obtain a sampling size that is more representative of the wide variety of slime makers.

In addition to further exploring the intersections of media consumption/production and maker practices, we may explore how audience engagement differs on different platforms, how slimers use new and novel approaches to grow their audience and business, and how slime video makers critique their own making processes and video production. Furthermore, we aim to find other video trends and documenting of the make outside of slime. In this way, we will determine whether other video-production processes follow this similar model or whether our model must be expanded to incorporate other video trends.

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