

A COMMUNITY UNITED? UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF
GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE QUEER COMMUNITY

BY

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Introduction

Every year in June, communities all around the world stop to celebrate the anniversary of the Stonewall riots that occurred in New York in 1969. When the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar, that fateful night, queer men and women rebelled against the authorities and created a massive stir in the city for days afterwards. This famous event is world-renowned and has even been referred to as the "...birth of the gay liberation movement" (Hall, 2010, pp. 546). While nearly everyone is aware of the Stonewall riots, they are especially important to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community (LGBTQ), as they signify the turning point from secrecy and oppression to openness and acceptance. However, the LGBTQ community is not a homogenous one, and the riots and other liberation movements have affected members in vastly different ways. Although the term "community" connotes a certain sense of solidarity and togetherness, past research has shown that this may not be the reality, as LGBTQ members have been found to judge other members based on factors such as gender identity, gender performance, or race (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012).

Therefore, I have chosen to explore how queer men, queer women, and trans-identified individuals perceive and negotiate the gender order of the community. In this same context, I am also interested in determining the extent to which a sense of male privilege exists within this community. My aim is to contribute to the literature that relates to the LGBTQ community and how members of that community perceive and interact with fellow, but differently identified, members. It is important that we promote acceptance *between* LGBTQ members as well as the acceptance *of* LGBTQ members if

we are to continue to progress. There are still tensions and struggles that exist within this community, and progress is not a naturally occurring movement, nor is it ever guaranteed. It is easy to look back and think that women would have been allowed to vote and formal segregation would have ended at some point, regardless of the effort put into these movements. This is certainly not the case, and the same can be said about the queer liberation: it is not an inevitable or linear movement and it cannot be treated as such.

Terminology

When it comes to identities, there are as many different terms and phrases to describe them as there are people to claim them. As a result, there is not one agreed upon term to describe those who identify with a particular sexual orientation or gender. While terminology is constantly evolving, the LGBTQ community has reclaimed one term in particular in recent years and its usage has grown in popularity as a result. That term is ‘queer’, and Brontsema (2004) provides a detailed overview of the past and present uses and definitions of ‘queer’ and its importance in the LGBTQ community. Originally, ‘queer’ was used to describe anything that did not conform to social norms, including but not exclusive to gender or sexual behaviors and orientations. The term began to be used in the context of sexuality by referring only to gay men and became a derogatory term meant to demean and marginalize them.

However, the LGBTQ community began to reclaim ‘queer’ in the 1990’s to rebel against their critics by highlighting and challenging the negative meanings behind it. The reclamation of the term by the LGBTQ community prevented out-groups from using

‘queer’ as a tool to perpetuate hate and discrimination and it became a source of empowerment as a result. Yet Brontsema reminds us that not everyone is in support of the reclamation of ‘queer’, as some feel it is impossible to separate the term from its pejorative use. This is especially true with older generations as they have been privy to the hurtful usages of the term in the past and understandably cannot ignore the years of negativity and pain that the term carries with it. Brontsema also notes that while reclamation can be a powerful tool, it is not an end in itself. As long as discrimination exists, there will be a term to describe it; therefore the reclamation of one term does not prevent another derogatory one from surfacing.

That being said, I have chosen to use the term ‘queer’ to describe gay men and lesbian women and replace the term ‘homosexual’, ‘gay’, and ‘lesbian’, unless I am referring to specific participants, where in that case I will use the labels they have chosen. There are a number of reasons why I have chosen to use ‘queer’ when referring to members of the LGBTQ community. First, I feel that the term ‘homosexual’ is archaic and still laden with negative connotations from its past use in medical and psychiatric texts. Also, ‘queer’ is a much broader term and can carry different meanings, while ‘homosexual’, ‘gay’, and ‘lesbian’ refer exclusively to the gender one is attracted to and ignores the fluidity of and differences between sexual orientations, attractions, and behaviors. Finally, this project touches on many different notions of gender identity and performance, and some participants may choose to describe themselves as queer because of their identifications with gender rather than sexuality. Therefore, I feel that ‘queer’ is more inclusive to everyone, regardless of whether they consider themselves to be queer because of their sexuality, gender, or both.

Theoretical Framework

As I previously mentioned, those who identify as a member of the LGBTQ community are assumed to be supportive and accepting of their fellow members, an assumption that is sometimes false. One reason why it is important for fellow LGBTQ members to embrace each other is based on the notion of family and kinship. It was once believed that family and true kin are theoretically forever, unlike friendships, which are more fluid and voluntary and can be questioned and challenged (Weston, 1998). Although many queer individuals are able to rely on their families for support and love after coming out, there are also many instances of disownment and relationship termination (Weston, 1998). Therefore, the historical notion of kinship and familial norms has come under scrutiny and begun to evolve as queer couples and other non-normative families gain acceptance and grow in number. This change in the definition of family is new in mainstream culture, but less so to the LGBTQ community specifically. As some families disown their queer members, it is not surprising that friendships within the LGBTQ community are extremely important and are often viewed by those involved as equally as deep and meaningful as genuine familial ties (Weston, 1998). In this context, most individuals from the queer community are able to choose whom they view as kin or family (Weston, 1998). Therefore, it is not assumed or automatic that other LGBTQ members are considered family, or even friends.

Although queer individuals often describe their friendships with other queers as extremely solid and supportive (Weston, 1998), these statements often refer to friendships between same members, such as queer men and queer men. The literature is often unclear with regards to friendships between different members within the LGBTQ

community. Kath Weston (1998) makes a brief reference about friendships occurring between queer men and queer women, however there is no detail provided and no mention of how drag queens and transgender individuals fit within this paradigm. It could be posited that queer men and queer women are compatible as their gender identities are normative and unquestioned, whereas drag queens and trans- individuals deviate from socially acceptable expressions of gender, however this is simply speculation.

When it comes to communities specifically, Steven Brint (2001) discusses the concept of 'community' and how it does not have an overly concrete definition. Brint describes eight different types of community structures, and touches on how modern communities can look much different in comparison to past versions. The eight subtypes of community structures that Brint identified are as follows: communities of place, communes and collectives, localized friendship networks, dispersed friendship networks, activity based elective communities, belief based communities, imagined communities, and virtual communities. All these communities have different intensities and combinations of concepts such as stratification/hierarchies, rules and regulations, the need for face-to-face interaction, and/or appreciation of individualism versus enforced conformity. It is these structural factors that make some communities operate differently than others. For example, a belief-based, communal community does not function like a activity based elective community, as the former usually has a clear leader(s), stronger boundaries between members and non-members, and high levels of enforced conformity in comparison to the latter. However, Brint also notes that all communities have some sense of power, division, and separation of interest; it is just the level to which these concepts are reinforced that differs. There are also times that members of the most

reserved and seriously taken communities do not interact with each other any more than they do with non-members. Therefore, communities differ not only by their type, but also by the particular members themselves, as belonging to a community does not mean that you chose to express that membership in the same way that others may.

When it comes to theories surrounding sexuality and gender, I prefer what Weston (1998) deems the “street theorizing” approach (pp. 145). This view emphasizes the fluidity of individuals and stresses that one’s expression of sexuality, gender, or relationships is often dependent on context. How individuals choose to express various sides of themselves is not nearly as stable as a “straight theorizing” approach would assume, as it depends on a variety of factors, such as the environment, power relations, and any other individuals involved (Weston, 1998, pp. 145). This is especially true with regards to power differences as status and authority can and does dictate behaviour in many settings. Power struggles have always existed between dominant and subordinate groups (Weston, 1998), and members of the queer community have been historically viewed as inferior to the heterosexual, cisgendered population. However, it is certainly plausible that dominant and subordinate subgroups exist within the larger group of LGBTQ members, thereby creating internal power struggles and hierarchies.

This idea is particularly tied with the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality is rooted in the notion that our many identities do not exist in a vacuum; they are not separate from or unaffected by one another. Each of our identities provides us with privilege in some contexts, and serves to remove that privilege in others. However, it is not just one identity itself that affects our levels of privilege and power, but the way all our identities combine and intersect with each other that allows us to occupy a very

complex position in any and every social context. This position is also affected by the intersectional identities of those we are interacting with, the change in our identities over time, the knowledge that we possess a certain identity and how obvious that is to others, and the relevance and strength of our identities, among other factors. Intersectionality shows the complicated nature of a variety of social constructs, as none are black and white, yet they do affect how we treat people who occupy a certain social space.

A great example of why we need to consider the effect of intersectionality is when we discuss male privilege. A quick, superficial glance at the phrase ‘male privilege’ would indicate that men are more privileged and powerful than any other group in any and all social situations. However, this is a false assumption, as many men do not reap the benefits of male privilege in all contexts. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discuss hegemonic masculinity, which is not only the ideas that define masculinity, but the actual pattern of practice and action that allows male dominance to remain. Hegemonic masculinity may be one of many types of masculinities, however it is the most normative when it comes to how masculinity is viewed in general. It is the most masculine of all masculinities, and served as a standard from which the patriarchal gender system was based on. Connell and Messerschmidt note that queer men brought to light the idea of a masculinity hierarchy as a result of the discrimination and abuse they suffered at the hands of straight men. This supports the idea that the patriarchy is subject to change over time, as prior to the gay liberation movement, queer men either denied or hid their identity and often acted as masculine and as straight as possible to ward off any suspicion. In this way, they were often unaffected by the masculinity hierarchy in a public forum, as they were treated like straight, cisgendered, men. Also, poor men,

disabled men, and men of color are never awarded the type of power and privilege that is held by upper class, able-bodied, white men, regardless of their sexuality. Those who occupy more than one of those positions are at an even greater disadvantage. Therefore, it becomes clear that masculinity and male privilege are not easily defined concepts as they are heavily affected by intersectionality. It is erroneous to assume that male privilege is rooted in biological ideas of male versus female, as they are actually founded on cultural notions of gender and are sensitive to differences both between and within genders (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005).

Literature Review

Those who identify as queer have had to fight vehemently to be given many basic human rights that were easily awarded to other groups. As late as the 1960's, being queer was deemed illegal in many countries, including the United States of America, where gay bars were raided and attendee's attacked and arrested (Hock, 2012). Homosexuality was even listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 1973 when it was finally removed due to queer activism and a lack of evidence supporting the idea that it was a dysfunction or an illness (Butcher, Mineka, Hooley, Taylor, & Antony, 2010). Until then, it was considered pathological and criminal, a sickness stemming from childhood that needed to be cured through therapy or punishment (Butcher et al., 2010).

Thankfully, mainstream, current culture has slowly begun to accept those who identify as queer and offer same-sex couples the rights that are automatically awarded to heterosexual couples. In Canada, marriage equality has been legal across the country

since July of 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2012a), making it the third country in the world to legally recognize such unions (Statistics Canada, 2012c). However, the United States is quickly catching up, with seven states passing laws to allow for marriage equality by 2012 and two others recognizing marriages that have been performed in one of those states (Hock, 2012). Queer men and women are able to form meaningful, healthy, and functional romantic relationships (Hock, 2012), making them no different than a traditional couple in this regard. These types of revelations have allowed same-sex couples to adopt children and redefine the meaning of family. In Canada, more than 9% of same-sex couples have children living at home, with over 80% of those being female same-sex couples (Statistics Canada, 2012c). Nevertheless, hate crimes against queers are still prevalent in Canada, with 157 incidents of violent and non-violent hate crimes committed against queer individuals in 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2012d).

However, they are not the only group who has had to struggle for their rights, as those who identify as transgender (trans*) have also been marginalized. Trans* individuals are those who believe that their biological gender is incongruent with the gender they feel they are, known as one's gender identity (Hock, 2012). The medical community views transgenderism as being a rare phenomenon, however, estimates are difficult to deduce and often unreliable, as many of these individuals still live in secret (Hock, 2012). Factor and Rothblum (2008) found that when compared to their non-transgender siblings, transgender individuals were more likely to experience harassment and discrimination while receiving less support from their immediate family. This persists despite the fact that some jurisdictions have specifically included trans* individuals in their anti-discrimination laws (Hock, 2012).

Along with jurisdictional changes, we have also made changes to trans* terminology and its associated diagnoses over the years. While homosexuality was removed from the DSM decades ago, gender identity disorder remained in the DSM until and including the fourth revised addition. Referring to transgendered individuals as disordered had many negative consequences, and allowed for the stigmatization of these individuals. Furthermore, many interpreted the diagnosis as an illness that could and should be treated and cured. These interventions almost always tried to convince people that they were not trans*, which can have life-ending consequences. When the DSM-V was released, gender identity disorder was notably changed to gender dysphoria. There are many differing opinions when it comes to having any mention of transgendered identities included in a diagnostic manual. Those against it argue that it leads people to believe that there is something wrong with trans* individuals; they are physiologically mutated, mentally ill, or simply not normal when compared to cisgendered individuals. However, insurance companies require a diagnosis to cover the expensive transition surgeries and associated procedures that many (not all) transgendered individuals require to ease the unbearable dysphoria they are experiencing. As the current policies stand, without some type of medical diagnosis, any surgical procedures and/or hormone replacement therapy would be considered cosmetic and therefore not covered. This would be devastating to many, as only a small portion of any population could readily afford these surgeries and/or procedures outright. So, while removing gender dysphoria from our medical books would be a huge step for trans* rights and acceptance, there would need to be a complete overhaul in our insurance and government Medicare policies to accompany such a removal. Also, the fact that trans* individuals are judged simply as a

function of gender dysphoria being a medical/mental diagnosis is a symptom of how our overlying, current culture views such things. Nearly every single diagnosis in the DSM is met with judgement or pity, as we see the person with them as being weak or disturbed. This is a very problematic way of thinking and needs to be addressed at the societal level if we are to move forward with even basic human rights and respect.

Finally, another group of individuals who are a part of the LGBTQ community and who have been discriminated against are those who practice drag. There are both drag queens and drag kings, however the existing research focuses mainly on drag queens. Drag queens are defined “as individuals who publically perform being women in front of an audience that knows they are ‘men’, regardless of how compellingly female-‘real’-they might otherwise appear.” (Schacht & Underwood, 2004, pp. 4). Drag kings are the opposite of this; they are individuals who transform into and perform as men. This transformation, regardless of gender, is typically considered an alter ego and most drag queens and kings have no desire to transition in their daily lives. This makes drag completely separate from transgenderism, as there is no dissonance regarding a drag king or queen’s biological sex and gender identity. Drag queens in particular sometimes experience difficulty fitting in as they are stuck in the crossfire of two socially deviant identities: heterosexual cross-dressers and queer men (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007). Some queer men feel that drag queens reinforce the erroneous feminine stereotype that is typically associated with being queer, making life more difficult as a result (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007). On the other hand, drag queens tend to distance themselves from transgendered individuals in an attempt to appear more ‘normal’ and socially ‘acceptable’ than their counterparts (Hopkins, 2004).

Both of these approaches and negative perspectives serve to create a divide and sense of male privilege within the LGBTQ community, challenging the notion that everyone in the LGBTQ community is accepting of each other's identities.

Unfortunately, this is not the only divide that exists within the LGBTQ community. Giwa and Greensmith (2012) noted that many LGBTQ individuals feel that the term 'community' is an inappropriate descriptor, as it implies a sense of unity, solidarity and homogeneity that does not exist in reality. They also found that those of different races often feel additional marginalization within the already marginalized group of LGBTQ individuals. However, this finding may be viewed as less surprising by some, as racial discrimination in general remains prevalent. Still, there are other divides within the LGBTQ community that go unnoticed, likely because it is assumed that members of such a community would feel connected to each other based on similar experiences of discrimination and harassment or the sense of struggle and confusion that may occur during their formative years. In reality, this is not always the case, as the queer community is comprised of many separate and distinct groups of individuals, all with different identities, opinions, and experiences. When these individual units are combined into one giant group, the potential for differences and disputes to arise between them becomes possible.

While this may seem like an obvious problem within the LGBTQ community, little research has been conducted on the issue and even less include drag performers in general or the interactions between them and other LGBTQ individuals, especially in Canada (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007; Hopkins, 2004; Taylor & Rupp, 2004; Schacht & Underwood, 2004). Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein (2007)

conducted one of the few studies looking at the interactions between drag queens and queer men. They chose a qualitative approach, using both naturalistic observations and participant interviews to gain a sense of the division between these two groups. Four different bars were frequented in this study, ranging from professional to amateur drag venues and included predominately gay bars that were often attended by drag queens for both work and pleasure. The authors were trying to determine if the venue had an effect on the interactions between drag queens and queer men, how often these interactions took place, and the nature and intimacy of the interactions.

Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein (2007) found considerable differences between bars in how drag queens and queer men intermingle with one another in a public setting. When attending a professional drag show, the drag queens were quite separate from the rest of the patrons, much like any performer is from their audience. When drag queens did interact with other attendees, it was in a rather respectful and professional manner. Conversely, when the drag show was more amateur, the interactions were extremely commonplace and sexually charged, with the authors comparing the atmosphere to a typical strip club. In this setting, the drag queens were not treated in a respectful manner but rather belittled and objectified. The gay dance bars had a different feel altogether. Drag queens and queer men preferred to stay separated, with neither group paying much attention to the other. At times there was a sense of flirtatiousness between the groups, but it was few and far between.

When Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein (2007) interviewed their participants, they received conflicting views regarding the divide between drag queens and queer men. Some participants felt that drag queens were not respected within the community and

were even looked down upon, while others felt that performing in drag provided a sense of status and admiration within that same community. However, the majority of participants agreed that when it came to romantic relationships, drag queens were not considered ‘boyfriend material’. Many queens had a difficult time finding a partner, as a lot of queer men did not take them seriously and therefore were not interested in forming meaningful and lasting relationships with them. This was evident in the interactions between the drag queens and queer men at the various venues: the queens were either viewed strictly as performers, sexual objects, or were not paid any attention to at all. This study shows a divide between these two groups, which is interesting when one considers that both groups are comprised of queer men, and could be assumed to be on a fairly level playing field as a result.

Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein (2007) quoted a drag queen, Victoria, as saying “[i]t is understood that the muscle guys don’t like the femmes, and the femmes don’t like the queens, and the queens don’t like the trannies, and we all don’t like the dykes” (pp. 26). This quote is bothersome as a lot of attention is paid to making heterosexuals accept queer individuals with no attempt to remind members of the LGBTQ community accept each other. The city in which my research took place, Halifax, Nova Scotia, is the most populated city in the Maritimes with over 408, 000 residents as of 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012b) and has large queer and drag populations in portion to its size. This may be a result of queer individuals leaving their rural lives behind to relocate in larger metropolitan cities where they hope to find both a sense of acceptance and a niche for themselves (Weston, 1998). However, this is not always accomplished, as the 2004 General Social Survey found that queer individuals are victims

of violence more often than heterosexuals and feel discriminated against three times more often (Statistics Canada, 2008). As I mentioned earlier, Canada reported 157 incidents of violent and non-violent hate crimes against queer individuals in 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2012d), with the general public assuming that all are committed by heterosexuals. It is unknown how many of these crimes are perpetrated by fellow LGBTQ individuals and how many incidents go unreported.

Canada: A Look Back

Canada is often viewed as a rather progressive country when it comes to LGBTQ rights and acceptance, however, Canada has its own spotted past that includes the persecution and prosecution of members of the LGBTQ community. The Criminal Code of Canada was revised in 1969 to legalize what were considered homosexual acts when performed in private by two consenting adults (Warner, 2002), however social customs are often slow to catch up to legal reforms. Therefore, while private acts were theoretically safe from formal prosecution, they remained highly criticized and discouraged in the social sector. But then again, even the amendments to the Criminal Code were typically ignored in court cases as late as 1984; this was especially true with regards to custody battles over children that were the result of past heterosexual relationships (Warner, 2002). The general rule was as follows: it was okay to be gay, as long as you acted straight.

This kind of mentality largely contributed to the ineffectiveness of the amendments to the Criminal Code. Warner (2002) reminds us that law enforcement and justice officials are subject to the same societal norms as the rest of the population. They

are surrounded from birth by the same judgments, discourses, and values as the rest of us, yet are often expected to rise above or ignore them in an effort to prevent these social constraints from clouding their professionalism. This is a nearly impossible task as many social norms and mores operate on a subconscious and automatic level; they take little to no conscious thought or effort to uphold and adhere to. As a result, the changes made to formal laws were not sufficient on their own and did not protect members of the queer community from the homophobia that remained.

Homophobic acts during this time were not restricted to social isolation and maltreatment; homophobia did extend into the realms of criminal law. In 1978, almost a decade after the decriminalization of homosexuality, a bathhouse located in downtown Toronto known as The Barracks was raided by police (Warner, 2002). Three years later, four more bathhouses were raided in the same city (Warner, 2002). Warner (2002) mentions that these types of busts were often highly exaggerated by the media at the time and falsely linked to actual crimes such as torture, child pornography, and drug distribution. Also, in order to circumvent the legality of homosexuality, indecency and bawdyhouse charges were commonly laid during the 1970's and 80's after bathhouse and gay bar raids. However, not all charges were connected to bar and bathhouse raids; police often entrapped individuals by dressing in plain clothes and seducing unsuspecting queer men. If these men let their guard down, they found themselves arrested and publically shamed, causing them to lose their jobs, their families, or even to attempt or commit suicide (Warner, 2002). Police also indirectly persecuted those from the queer community by blatantly ignoring or actively encouraging homophobic acts, both verbal and physical in nature (Warner, 2002).

However, there is a small sliver of positivity to the raids that occurred across the country. While they were extremely unlawful, they forced people to think about queer rights and lead to a lot of activism from both the LGBTQ and straight communities (Warner, 2002). Those who engaged in same-sex behaviors could no longer hide in the shadows and slowly became visible in the community at large. Therefore, the open abuse that was endured by the queer community is what caught the attention of activists and everyday people who felt that the treatment of LGBTQ individuals was unjust and unconstitutional. This eventually led to feminist and queer movements that brought us to where we are today with regards to queer rights, equity, and equality. Although we are certainly not at the end of our journey, Canada is further ahead than many other developed countries when it comes to queer rights and support and remains pointed in the proper direction.

While Canada is one country that helps lead the queer movement, Canadian based research in this area is still necessary. Therefore, for my thesis I have chosen to explore the relationships between queer men, queer women, and trans* identified individuals. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the dynamic of male privilege, or what Connell (2009) calls the “patriarchal dividend” that may be present within this community (pp. 142). I will also examine how LGBTQ community members perceive and negotiate the gender order of their community. I believe that researching the divides within the LGBTQ community is as important as researching the divides between the queer and heterosexual communities. We will never truly reach a state of acceptance unless discrimination within the LGBTQ community is attended to if it exists. This is a topic that the current literature appears to overlook and something that I hope to address with

my research and thesis.

Methods

While this project was guided by principles of feminist methodology, there are no methods that are inherently good or bad, just better or worse choices. I chose to let my participants guide the interviews, and I allowed them to discuss their experiences in whatever level of detail they felt comfortable with. They chose their own labels or lack thereof, and often explained what those labels meant to them specifically. I also spoke with anyone who was interested in speak with me, and I did not worry about having a certain number of participants who identified with a particular label, as this project was more about lived experiences than representativeness.

The interviews themselves were in-depth, qualitative interviews with participants and key informants from the queer community in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of how their gender and sexual identities affect their membership and experiences within that community. I also investigated the extent to which male privilege exists and how it has affected their membership and experiences within that same space. Participants were gathered by utilizing the snowball effect. I was fairly connected within the LGBTQ community, and I approached people who I thought might be interested in being involved in this type of project. Those who participated often recommended my project to others, providing me with more participants. Therefore, the relationships between the participant and myself ranged from close friend to complete stranger. The interviews took place between the months of February and April of 2014 and were all conducted in person at a meeting place of their choosing. The interviews

were guided but open; I used direct questions and various probes to allow the participants to answer freely and provide me with the flexibility to follow their lead while remaining on topic. Each interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder and I was the sole transcriber of these interviews. I then analyzed each interview carefully to determine the general and most frequently occurring themes.

Participants

The people who participated in this project did so voluntarily and without compensation. There were ten participants in total and most chose to be referred to using a pseudonym. Interestingly, I was able to include a set of identical female twins in this project, whom I interviewed separately. There was a large amount of variation when it came to participants' gender and sexual identities, which enriched the project with regards to the kinds of experiences discussed and the types of voices that were heard. Including people with different sexual and gender identities was crucial to gaining a better understanding of how the gender order of the LGBTQ community is perceived and negotiated.

Topics and Themes

I decided to keep my interviews focused mainly on four different, but potentially connected, topics: gender/gender presentation, sexuality, male privilege, and LGBTQ community support and inclusion. The topics were chosen based on my interest in how they affected participants' membership in the LGBTQ community specifically. I created my questions with these topics in mind and kept the interviews steered in these

directions. In doing so, I was able to identify themes within each general topic, and noticed many common threads despite the diversity of my participants with regards to gender and sexual identities. One of these threads led me to create a fifth topic that I have coined ‘sexuality presentation’; I will explain this phrase in further detail in my analyses. I will discuss each topic and the themes I found separately, and bring everything together in my final discussion and conclusion.

Gender/Gender Presentation

Although gender is a rather broad term that means different things to different people, there were certainly a few common themes that were discussed during my interviews. Gender affects nearly everything we do and has a huge bearing not only on how others view us, but also how we view ourselves. I asked participants how they would identify their gender and gave them the option to simply identify with a particular label, describe in more detail how they view their gender, or both. When it came to the people I spoke with, half of my participants mentioned that their gender identity was at the forefront when it came between that and their sexuality. One of the reasons for this trend seemed to be that gender is often used as a vehicle for public self-expression. Also, while one’s gender identity is typically not in one’s control or of their choosing, how they decide to express and present their gender certainly is. When comparing gender to sexuality, Poppy, Jay, and Kimberly felt that the latter was simply something they performed in private and did not reflect their personalities in any way.

“Well my gender’s obviously more prominent, so people notice that first, so obviously they’re judging me right off the bat based on my gender. Whereas they don’t know that I’m bisexual until I say it or they see it”

“My sexuality has really no bearing on my personality I don’t think? But my gender does because it impacts how I express myself, how I want to be referred to”

“I would say gender is way stronger because your gender defines who you are, that’s how you present yourself, you’re saying ‘this is who I am’”

Two participants, Neek and Matthew, felt that each of their identities were of relatively equal importance. Both self-identified as gay males, and neither identity was stronger with regards to their sense of self. Tito, who self-identified as gender non-binary and sexually queer or gay depending on context, felt that while gender was not necessarily a stronger identity per se, it was the identity they were currently most focused on.

“In recent years I’ve become more interested in gender as opposed to sexuality....I’ve been gay for a while now so I’ve been through the whole sexual orientation thing and had those conversations and fought those fights so to speak, and gender’s kind of like, the new big one for me, so it’s kind of what I focus on”

While initially I was interested on gender identification specifically, I noticed that gender presentation was a major issue for many of my participants and warranted much attention. For a lot of my participants, how they chose to present their gender was more of a concern than their gender identity itself. Furthermore, while many felt that their gender and sexuality were congruent, they also felt that their gender presentation itself effected how seriously others took their sexuality. This was especially a problem for Poppy and Ky, both of whom are bisexual women. They often encountered resistance regarding their bi-status due what they felt was a straight presentation. They sometimes felt as though others were not validating their bisexuality as they present “normatively feminine, hetero looking”.

“I mean the queer community is welcoming to a degree, but also bisexuality or being a queer woman in general you have to fit a certain identity, like you have to identify queer enough almost, you have to fit an image, and if you don’t they’re going to be like ‘oh you’re a straight girl, you’re clearly not what we’re looking for’”

“Within the LGBTQ thing it’s a weird place to be as a woman especially because I don’t present as queer at all. I still think that people don’t really take it that seriously and that I somehow lack legitimacy in that community”

“Well my biggest fucking problem is that no one thinks I’m bi! Ever!”

Lesley had a similar, but opposite, experience regarding her gender presentation affecting her sexuality, as the former did not really reflect the fluidity of the latter. While the assumptions others often made about her sexuality based on her gender presentation were not always accurate or necessarily positive, it did allow her to explore other areas of herself that she ignored in her younger years.

“The gayer looking I got through my life I also played less sports and stuff...because I didn’t feel like I had to have this really tough girl image, I just kind of started getting more in touch with my feelings and poetry and art”

Sexuality

Sexuality plays a big role in our lives even though it may be second to gender for many. As a heterosexual cisgendered female, shortened to ‘het-cis’ by some, I fell victim to the idea that those who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual connect very strongly with their sexuality in comparison to the straight community. After conducting a few interviews and reflecting on my own sexuality, I came to the conclusion that for me and many participants, sexuality is simply one small aspect of our lives and overall identities. Interestingly, when it comes to our own sexuality, we often consider it to be private and

personal, yet we are fascinated by the sexuality of others and constantly want to know more. In addition to our unnecessary amount of curiosity, we often reduce others to their sexual label or identity, thereby ignoring all other aspects that not only make them who they are, but that they likely consider more important or meaningful. Lesley made this especially clear:

“There’s definitely been times where people approach you because of the sexuality they assume you have. Same thing as like ‘oh I’m going to Reflections,’ which is a gay bar, but I’m not going there to meet women or participate in just the fact that I’m a lesbian. I go there because I like to dance and the music is good but because I go there looking the way that I do with the assumptions made, girls will start approaching me or something like that and then they might see me somewhere else and refer to me as that lesbian or the one that dances and stuff like that, so that kind of just turns me off from it because I’m like ‘but there’s more to it, I’m more than that’”

Also, when it came to sexual identities, a few people were hesitant to refer to their sexuality using a single label. The issue with many of our current labels such as gay and lesbian is that they are laden with expectations and assumptions regarding ones sexuality and gender. Similar to gender, I asked participants how they would identify their sexuality and gave them the option to simply identify with a particular label, describe in more detail how they view their sexuality, or both. My group was completely split on this matter, as Matthew, Neek, Iris, Poppy and Ky all identified rather easily with a particular label: the first two as gay and the last three as bisexual. However, Tito, Heidi, Lesley, Kimberly and Jay all had more complicated answers regarding their sexuality. Their identities were affected by not only how they view their sexuality, but how others viewed it as well. For example, Tito and Heidi felt that the labels they previously identified with (gay and lesbian respectively) were no longer effective in describing their sexualities, and both have since moved towards using ‘queer’ as a describer, as it allows for growth and

fluidity while having fewer gender expectations attached to it.

“I prefer it because it’s just more open, and as well as that, with having a non-binary identity, queer is just easier to say than gay, because if I say ‘I’m gay’ then it implies something? About my gender as well, whereas queer just leaves it open”

“I would say queer, I like the umbrella term. Again, for the longest time I always identified as lesbian but when I became more actively involved in the queer community I realized that sexuality is very fluid in most circumstances and is not always set in stone, so I mean the umbrella term ‘queer’ I think really encompasses that, like now I can be attracted to a drag king or a trans* man and I was in a relationship recently with a trans* man so I felt like lesbian didn’t really fit that, so queer”

Similarly, Lesley felt that the term ‘lesbian’ was not entirely accurate in describing her sexuality, as it inaccurately described her gender preference and ignored the fact that emotional connections are extremely important to her.

“An identifier seems very boxed in and doesn’t leave me a lot of room to grow as a person or open my mind up to new things, and because I’m not really sex driven, feelings really have to be present before I’m even sexually attracted to somebody. I’ve been attracted to guys and I’ve been attracted to really more feminine guys or drag queens, I’ve been attracted to gender fluid people, so I’d say my sexuality in itself is fairly fluid or vague”

Kimberly and Jay, both of whom are transgender, felt that others viewed their sexuality differently from how they viewed it, which made it difficult for them to label it. Kimberly, a trans* woman, and Jay, a trans* man, each made it clear that while their sexuality was not the business of others, it was still of annoyance to them that a disconnect existed between how they viewed their sexuality and how others viewed it.

“I would like to say I’m a straight woman, however society just doesn’t see it that way. Just because at this point where I’m not completely changed over, like I haven’t had the surgery yet, I feel like guys even that I would be dating are not completely straight because my anatomy isn’t completely female yet”

“Straight? For some reason that makes me feel belligerent. I’m like ‘no, I’m not’. That’s too boxed in...that’s too straight and narrow because all my life I’ve been different, I think maybe that’s too boring for me”

Bisexual women in my project seemed to have a particularly difficult time regarding their sexuality, for a variety of reasons, all of which had to do with the perception of others. As previously mentioned during my discussion on gender and gender presentation, Ky and Poppy did not feel as though they presented as queer, and therefore were often assumed to be straight. Ky was even met with suspicion or shock upon clarifying that she was in fact bisexual, strictly based on her gender presentation.

“...I was like ‘well no, but I also date women’ and he was so shocked and then told this other gay guy ‘she dates women! She’s bi!’ and they were like ‘no you’re not’ and I was like ‘yeah I am! Thanks for telling me that I’m not, but I promise you I am, I’m telling you right now that I am”

What made this particularly interesting was that Poppy has an identical twin, Iris, and both identify as bisexual females. They look completely alike and have similar styles with regards to their clothing and aesthetic choices; both present themselves in what would be considered a rather feminine manner. However, there is one seemingly small difference that has a huge impact on how they are viewed by others: their hair length. Iris has short hair and has been known to sport a shaved head, whereas Poppy has fairly long locks. As a result, Iris’ “short hair is a red flag for people”, and she comes off as looking queerer as a result.

“Yeah people say that I come off as more gay than her (Poppy) for sure. And yes, I have short hair, but I feel like when people see that I have short hair they start looking for reasons to feel that I’m more gay than she is. It’s very strange. But I’ve been told that I come off as more gay than her, and then they go ‘oh no no no, it’s not just because of your short hair’ and it’s like ‘well bullshit! Yes it is!”

Sexuality Presentation

It was these discussions of ‘presenting queer’ that led me to create this section of my thesis. Unlike the portion that focused on gender presentation, I felt that sexuality presentation deserved its own separate designation, as it has received little to no attention from academia prior to this project. I only realized that this was a serious trend while analyzing and reflecting on my interviews, but it was pervasive enough to be included as what I call one’s ‘sexuality presentation’.

I believe that the idea of sexuality presentation is different than gender presentation for a number of reasons. We have come to accept that gender is visible for everyone to see, and our gender presentation is a way to express oneself to the world. Also, while the queer community is certainly challenging the heteronormative rules surrounding gender presentation, we are all still warming up to the idea that gender and gender presentation are not necessarily synonymous; someone can choose to present stereotypically masculine or feminine yet still identify as female and male respectively. In comparison to gender and its respective presentation, bedroom behaviour is typically considered the business of only those involved unless otherwise desired. That being said, I have noticed that many people feel that their sexuality is expressed through their aesthetic choices and style, ranging from clothing to hair to make up. Therefore, their outward appearance not only dictates how others see their gender, but also their sexuality. Regardless of whether these assumptions are correct or incorrect is irrelevant; assumptions are being made and those affected are being treated accordingly, based on the sexual orientation that others think they identify with. When it came to the people I conversed with, sometimes the assumptions were correct, other times they were incorrect,

but almost everyone touched on some aspect of their sexuality presentation, leading me to believe that this was a topic worthy of further discussion.

With regards to those who identify as gay and male, Neek was one of the first to bring this idea to my attention. Kimberly, while now identifying as a queer/straight female, also discussed her past experiences when she presented as a gay male before she transitioned. Both Neek and Kimberly mentioned presenting as what would be considered to be stereotypically gay, whether currently or in the past. I found that this did not fit into the definition of gender presentation; no one was making any assumptions about their gender or questioning the fact that they were male at the time. Neek was talking about the visibility of his sexuality, which sparked my question of “do you feel like you present gay?” to which he responded:

“I think so yeah. It’s hard to say ‘present gay’ because it depends on from what perspective you’re coming from, but if we’re going to go with general society and we’re going to go with the overall average, the average amount of people I think would definitely perceive me as gay. Absolutely”

Kimberly also discussed something similar regarding her experiences pre-transition when she identified as a gay male.

“I mean I wore skinny jeans, I did my hair, I wore a little bit of boy makeup and so I was quote unquote stereotypically gay”

She also discusses her sexuality presentation post transition in relation to her partner, who has been supportive throughout the entire transition process.

“To the outside world it looks normal because he appears like a straight, everyday, average Joe...he’s just very masculine, you would look at him and say ‘that’s a straight man’...and so we never got looks walking anywhere, we never experienced that uncomfortable feeling”

Kimberly and Neek also referred to sexuality presentation when discussing norms and social desirability within the gay male community specifically. It became clear that societal norms are so pervasive and strongly embedded into our culture that the LGBTQ community cannot fully escape them. Gender norms still apply to same-sex couples, and as much as some of this pressure comes from our current culture at large, some of it comes from within the LGBTQ community as well. It appears to be more desirable to present as stereotypically straight than stereotypically gay, which results in gay men looking for other gay men who appear more masculine to the outside world, according to the “masculinity ladder” that exists within the LGBTQ community.

“I’m not saying everyone but the generalization – every fantasy of a gay man is to have a straight looking beau and a straight looking dude”

“...basically the more conservatively male you are is going to benefit you more. When it’s time to go looking for partners you will be favored more in the gay community because you are resembling a heterosexual male the most...that’s who everyone wants because your dating that person in theory – this is peoples’ mentality talking – if you’re with them in public and people will pull the card ‘oh he or she’s gay?! What?! I had no idea!’ and it becomes this magical surprise and then you as the half scale gay, you get validation because you’ve scouted out the one gay in the city that is ultra hyper masculine”

This idea of how to present ones sexuality appeared throughout my interviews with a variety of people and is not unidirectional. While it is favorable to some to present or surround themselves with those who present as straight, it is just as favorable for others to present queer. As mentioned earlier, Ky and Poppy are not taken seriously as bi women based on their heterosexual presentation. Their sexuality presentation works in the opposite direction as Kimberly’s pre-transition presentation and Neek’s current presentation; while Kimberly and Neek may have been criticized for presenting too

queer, Ky and Poppy are criticized for not presenting queer enough. Furthermore, Lesley's sexuality presentation gave people the impression that she was a lesbian, which then lead them to make a host of other assumptions about her that were untrue. Similarly, Jay's sexuality presentation results in the assumption that he is heterosexual, which is an identity that he is not comfortable with.

“I got a sense that because a lot of the other lesbians that looked like me had a certain personality or certain way of doing things...and that didn't fit me, but I started to realize that if people just looked at me and saw 'lesbian' that there's a whole lot of assumptions that are made with that and so even though people may not have been treating me badly, they just weren't casting ideas on me that were accurate”

“I mean people will assume I'm straight because I'm in a relationship with a female because that's how people are, but I'm not straight, I don't really know exactly what I am, and I think that's lovely”

While gender presentation and sexuality presentation are not completely separate constructs with zero overlap, I feel that they are not synonymous either. These individuals identify with a particular sexuality or have certain viewpoints and beliefs regarding their sexuality, which is intentionally or unintentionally presented to others, who in turn make accurate or inaccurate assumptions. People will always assume things about us by the way we present ourselves and this is not limited to gender and sexuality. Intelligence, socioeconomic status, promiscuity, and religious affiliation are a few examples of things we believe we can determine simply by taking a fleeting glance at another individual. Should we care about how others perceive us? No, absolutely not. However, we often do take stock into the opinion of others, and receive confirmation and validation of our identities when others view us the way we view ourselves. It is not shocking to anyone that one's gender presentation affects the perception of their gender; we only recently began challenging gender norms and separating ones presentation from

their identification. While we still have work to do in the realm of gender, it seems that discussions regarding how one presents their sexuality are not being had. As we have made so much headway with normalizing what was once considered aberrant sexualities, we are starting to focus more on gender and trans* issues. While challenging gender norms and advocating for gender equality and trans* rights is a completely necessary and incredible movement, we must not forget that we still have some work to do in the field of sexuality when it comes to what we assume to be the presentation of and expectations attached to different sexual identities.

Male Privilege

The concept of male privilege is too vast and complex to be easily defined in the time frame of my interviews. That being said, I did want to ask my participants to define it while also talking about their personal experiences with male privilege. I felt that comparing participant's experiences with male privilege both in and outside of the LGBTQ community was important if I was to gain a sense of how it affects a community that is assumed to be combative towards social conservatism and normativity. Two things were very clear: people often have rather simplified ideas of what male privilege is, and it is so engrained and covertly upheld in most cases that many cannot recognize the ways in which it affects them from day to day.

I understood that asking people to define male privilege was a near impossible task, not because people are unfamiliar with the concept, but because there are so many aspects to the phrase that a single clear and concise definition is not feasible. However, I did want to find out what male privilege meant to them individually and what they believed it entailed. When it came to the definitions, they were all rather similar, and

many focused on the surface definition of male privilege. By this, I mean that people basically reiterated what ‘male’ and ‘privilege’ mean, and then combined those separate definitions to define the greater concept. People generally felt that male privilege simply meant that men receive a greater number of opportunities than women and do not need to work as hard to be successful or taken seriously. This was true regardless of the gender of the participant.

“As a male I guess you are privileged because males are typically dominant in the society we live in, so there are less barriers to overcome as male”

“It seems like as a woman there’s that uphill battle against everything which I think is really where male privilege is. Just that having to work harder for everything...anytime I see a girl competing on the same level they just tend to be running around and working ten times harder somehow”

“Male privilege to me would mean having access to more resources without having to do anything. So for me there’s more available, there really is, in life in general, and it’s horrible to say it, I’m ashamed to open that can of worms, but it is access to more”

“Male privilege just means that a male might get ahead more over a female would?”

“You see it in everyday life of just like, men speaking over women, and men getting more opportunities, and everything, everyday sexism”

“Male privilege is just being a male and having power over people who aren’t male”

While this is certainly true, it is only one aspect to male privilege and simply skims the surface of what male privilege is and how it affects our daily lives. It is also important to note that it hinders men’s opportunities as well, as they are discouraged from engaging in activities and behaviors or entering job markets that are considered to be feminine in nature. This reality that not all men benefit equally from male privilege is not

always acknowledged. That being said, some participants were able to dig deeper into what male privilege is and discuss the broader implications. Poppy, Ky, and Heidi all had this to say:

“I think it’s prevalent all through society and in everything that we do and everything we see. It’s the patriarchy; (it) influences all types of male privilege and you have to be very careful as to how we react to things around us”

“According to the World Bank, which is a reputable source, women own 1% of the world’s wealth. 1%! Of all the money in the banks, 1% of it belongs to women. So I mean if that’s not fucked up, I don’t even know...but in my opinion the biggest problem with it is that it just limits potential for both genders”

“You know you’ve got pay rates, and you look at the percentage of people who are unemployed and on social assistance and almost all of them are females, single mothers. You look at cases of domestic violence and a staggering percentage are male assaulting female scenarios...there’s a lot of unfinished business with feminism and people who refuse to call themselves feminists because there’s such a negative connotation that comes along with that term. And it’s like, we really we’re fighting for the equality of all genders. Not just male, not just female, but all genders”

Again, while men are certainly the main beneficiaries of male privilege, it does not affect all men equally. Straight and/or cisgendered men often ostracize queer men as the latter often challenge conservative social norms. Therefore, while men can benefit from male privilege at times, they can also be hindered by it as much as women. The intersectionality between being queer (whether through gender or sexuality identification) and other marginalized identities such as race, religion, socioeconomic status, and the presence of a disability further compounds this issue. It is important to recognize this as men are often homogenized into a single, privileged group, when in fact male privilege actually works against many male identified individuals. In order to truly combat the patriarchy that feeds male privilege in our culture, this cannot be left unaddressed. This is

clear when we look at the experiences of Neek, Kimberly, and Jay.

“...when you appear gay to societal standards, whatever that is, meaning the more feminine you appear, the more comfortable you are, creates a higher danger...if I’m going out, because I appear the way I do, often times I feel scouted out by certain people in the crowds who are really against the LGBT community...so therefore, when I’m in a bar setting and I identify as openly gay, the playing field for a heterosexual male to come up to me and give me problems for that reason is completely game and that’s ok. I don’t think it’s ok but unfortunately it exists”

“Well before I decided to transition I came to the fact that I was a gay male and that’s what I thought I was, and I found you get your jerks coming through in public who are like ‘faggot!’ or ‘queer!’ when they’re on the bus...so I noticed a lot of disrespect from people...I feel gay males are more condemned then regular males”

“It’s dangerous. I’ve been pushed around in the bathroom before, I don’t even like to talk about it. There’s a lot of things that happened to me because I’m visibly trans* that are dangerous, let alone detrimental to your own inner psyche, to yourself, starting inside”

Interestingly, Neek brought up a very thought-provoking idea regarding the privilege he feels he has gained from being openly gay. He feels that as sexualities that were previously considered aberrant are becoming more and more mainstream and normalized in our culture, businesses and companies are feeling the pressure to show that they are accepting of individuals who identify as queer. This gives him job opportunities that he may not have had otherwise as hiring committees are often looking for the “token gay” employee to serve as a real life example of how open and progressive they are.

“I think certain companies in the world want to almost use the gay card as a way to be able to say ‘we’re open! We’re diverse!’...we’ll use Starbucks as an example, they’re very active in the LGBTQ communities, but without hiring staff that are openly identified as gay, how are they going to prove that they’re open? So people say ‘we don’t hire based on sexual orientation’ but that’s bullshit because they actually do”

All these experiences are important to mention, because they show how complicated the concept of male privilege is; it is certainly not a cut and dry issue. Being male, whether assigned at birth or not, is simply not enough to guarantee the advantages that accompany male privilege. In fact, Kimberly actually felt that she was treated better as a trans* woman in comparison to when she presented as a gay male. This was especially interesting because most would assume that while she may have been treated worse as a gay male in comparison to if she had been a straight male, it would still be better than how she would be treated as a woman.

“Even looks from people, versus when I started transitioning and people could tell less and less that I was transgendered and I think to the naked eye people would think I’m female, I don’t get stares, I don’t get anything said to me, so I find I have a lot more respect from society as a woman”

I was also interested in how male privilege affected my participants personally, so I asked everyone to discuss their own lived experiences. In addition to the individuals I just mentioned, others were able to dictate how male privilege has affected them in general. In terms of the negative effects, Ky, Heidi and Poppy had this to say:

“Assumptions, and I think men being taken more seriously in general, and especially with older men I find I feel like more of a sexual object than someone who’s being taken seriously. Like in academia sometimes and when I’m applying for jobs and stuff, I feel such a difference if I’m in an interview with a woman and with a man”

“I’m a film maker by terms of formal education and the film industry is extremely male dominated, so coming in as a woman into the film industry, it’s difficult to be taken seriously at times, especially where I’ve come as a director and I’ve directed several projects and I’ve worked sometimes with all male crews...there’s definitely sometimes a power struggle even though the director’s supposed to be the top of the hierarchy and you’re not supposed to question the directors. I’ve definitely had men on my crews kind of question my authority”

“Even guys I’ve dated I had to school on feminism. People still make often sexist remarks and comments all the time. I feel like I’m always defending feminism and it shouldn’t be like that”

Of course, some of my participants benefited from male privilege, as they are male identified. Again, it is important to note that while they may have had advantages at times, they are not always awarded these advantages; it is highly context dependent. Jay and Neek touched on some of the ways they have been given extra opportunities based on their identifications as male.

“I get it now. I mean I got it then, but I literally get the privilege now. On the phone I get respected more, and it pisses me off because I don’t want to be respected more, I just want to be respected all the time. I wanted to be respected then (pre transition)...it’s like I wish I could still have the female voice on the phone just so that – I don’t know – you just want to make a difference somehow”

“I think that being a white male definitely, definitely has got me a lot more in life...I think technically I won the genetic lottery...I’m a tall white male who was brought up in a middle class family with a nice upbringing and I identify as gay so I could be the token gay. So do I think in general I won the ultimate combination of privilege? Yeah, I can guarantee”

What was most unnerving about asking people about their daily experiences with male privilege was that those who were assigned male at birth could not come up with any examples, and some felt as though they were not affected at all, whether positively or negatively. This is a blatant indication of how male privilege works almost in secret; it is so normalized, and surreptitious that we barely even recognize it anymore, even when asked to consciously reflect on it. These are some responses I received when I asked if it affected them in their daily lives:

“I think about it sometimes and I think that at some point it does (affect me), but it’s also hard for me to sit there and recognize when it does? But yeah, I can’t think of any specific examples”

“I’ve never been in a position where I could benefit from it I guess”

“Not me personally”

The purpose of asking people what male privilege meant to them and how they were affected by it in their daily lives was to simply get them to start thinking about this concept. Male privilege is heavily engrained in our culture, and while it can sometimes be obvious and overt, it acts mostly in very subtle, covert ways, as one can gather from the responses above. Therefore, I chose to ease people into the topic before asking them how male privilege affected them within the LGBTQ community specifically, which was my main interest. I received some interesting and varied responses to that question, which is likely because of the diversity of my sample with regards to gender and sexual identities. These identities, both separate and combined, clearly shaped their experiences in the queer community with regards to male privilege specifically.

“...to go back to what I was talking about as far as the stereotypical lesbian or butch lesbian is that there tends to be – I feel like I’m fighting against the idea of male privilege of walking in and being really promiscuous or something like that, I feel like that’s something that’s already assigned to a certain personality that butch women connect with men on?...but yeah I guess a butch woman trying to hit on a femme lesbian or whatever would have I think to some degree a bit of male privilege”

“I think that there is a distinction between the LGBTQ community and the queer community, where the queer community is more progressive and accepting and the LGBTQ community is more dominated by white gay cis males, so I think it’s different in that sense. An example would be if you look at Pride, a lot of the events are targeted to and put on by white gay males, versus the queer community where it’s a lot more queer and trans* focused”

“I know I’ve read articles on Jezebel and stuff about gay men who feel like they have some kind of privilege over women because they’re gay, so basically women are there as accessories to serve their lifestyles...and I’ve seen examples of guys putting their hands on women without asking for example, like gay men, because they feel

like it's ok because they're gay so obviously they're not sexually attracted to them so it's not sexual harassment"

"I do see male privilege there (in the LGBTQ community) and I see it very strongly within gay males. I find that gay men feel like they have the right to females' bodies...you find yourself dancing at a club and get approached by a gay man who will just grind up on you, and then maybe even kiss you or something, and it's ok because he's gay"

"If you look at Pride, Pride is marketed towards attractive, fit, gay men and gay men of wealth and of a certain status, and more often than not white gay men. So there's definite male privilege within the queer community. Drag queens, even though they're presenting female, drag queens for the large majority identify as men, and so when drag queens are getting almost all the shows, all the bookings, they're getting more notoriety, when somebody has heard of drag queens but doesn't even know what a drag king is, I think that's male privilege within itself as well"

These responses made it clear that male privilege exists in the LGBTQ community just as much as it exists in the community at large. It is a testament to how pervasive male privilege is in our current, mainstream culture, and how even the most progressive groups cannot escape its grasp. It is important to remind ourselves that male privilege is still very much alive in our culture, regardless of the communities we are discussing, and there is a lot more work to be done to combat this.

LGBTQ Inclusion and Support

Similar to how male privilege causes a sense of a gender hierarchy within the queer community, I was interested in discussing ones membership within that same community and how their gender and/or sexual identities affected it. I wanted to get their opinions on and experiences with inclusion within the queer community to shed some light on the dynamics and relationships that exist between so many differently identified groups. There were a few issues that were brought up, especially with regards to those

who identified as bisexual. Ky, Poppy, and Iris had a few problems when it came to being taken seriously within the LGBTQ community and having their sexuality viewed as a valid sexual identity, rather than a chosen behaviour.

“The problem with being bi is that it’s a challenging place to be because I think it inherently has a level of suspicion about it from the LGBTQ community. I feel like for a lot of people they’ll understand being bi as kind of an experimental (sic) phase or not a legitimate sexuality compared to people who have identified as straight or gay for their entire lives...I think it’s also challenging because I feel intimidated by women who have always identified as gay...those hardcore lesbians so to speak don’t take you very seriously because they think you’re just experimenting and you’re like a bar lesbian or whatever where you make out for men’s enjoyment but you’re not actually into women”

“I think lesbians are less accepting of bisexual people”

“If I was more queer, which I don’t even know how that would be a thing but...if I was totally 100% gay I feel I would be more accepted in the LGBTQ community...bisexuality is considered a very flippant term, and people just can apparently turn it on and off, so being lesbian would definitely give me more queer credentials”

However Ky, Poppy, and Iris were not the only people who had dealt with judgment or exclusion from the queer community. Many other individuals had reasons for feeling like they did not completely fit in for various reasons. Lesley and Kimberly are simply not interested in being social activists all the time; they just want to live their lives while being involved in the causes that they are particularly passionate about. Lesley wrestles with the idea of identifying with a label at all, let alone identifying strongly with one, whereas Kimberly has dealt with transphobia and even what I like to call ‘dragophobia’ within the LGBTQ community.

“My problem with it is that if I don’t identify in one of those letters – ...whether it’s myself doing it or the subconscious pressure from the community forcing me to not only pick something because it’s like they’ve given me a menu of things and they’re like ‘well come on,

you've got to be one of these' and I'd be like 'ok, well that one sounds close' and then I feel like there would be that extra step to be like 'ok, so now that you've accepted that you're this one thing, now put a lot of pride behind it and also kind of boast it to the world' and it's that extra step, the idea of it just kind of exhausts me"

"There's a cause for everything! It's like holy fuck!...it's too much. But you got to say 'no' at some point. And I feel like especially in the queer community if you're like 'I'm sorry, I don't have the time to put into it' you're looked at as just like 'you're so selfish! How dare you not look into this! It's like 'I'm just trying to live my life'"

"They wouldn't date a trans* or they just don't accept it...some of them don't even accept the drag community you know what I mean?"

Surprisingly, many individuals were not that involved in the queer community on a regular basis. They attended larger events like Pride and whatnot, however they either had a large amount of straight identified friends or had friends of a variety of genders and sexualities yet did not engage much in LGBTQ specific events or bar scenes. This was for a variety of reasons. Some have no reason at all or just don't identify strongly enough with their sexuality/gender or with the overall vibe of the community. Still others feel intimidated, while some simply receive a lot of their support from their family rather than the queer community itself.

"I'm not super experienced with being exposed to the community"

"I haven't felt a lot of understanding from people that I don't put my sexuality or gender really high up...I worry that it would feel like another load or something that I'd have to get behind and join community discussions about?...it would feel like I'd have to engage in yet another community where I've already engaged in the political community, the theatre community, the student community, so now I'm just like 'oh right, the gay one'"

"I would definitely say my sexuality seriously impacts my involvement in the LGBTQ stuff and it's weird because even now that I'm technically very much a member of the LGBTQ community, I still kind of feel like an outsider in a lot of ways because lesbians don't take me very seriously and gay men don't really give a fuck

because we're (bi women) irrelevant"

"There's a lot of weird stuff, like this subtle misogyny, racism, the entire appropriation of black culture, and a lot of the times I feel like the way you grow up in the gay community you're almost taught to privilege yourself over other people? And I think part of it is a resistance thing and it's like this 'we're out, we're loud, we're proud, and we won't give in to your concessions', but I also think it's problematic and we need to take a step back from it and look at it"

"I really wish I was more involved in the community to begin with...it's intimidating getting into it"

"...if I was more accepted in the community than I guess it would just entail me being more comfortable going to events and participating more in the community"

"I don't go to the community for needed support or for help, I go to the community because I support it...I feel support in my everyday life"

Kimberly, Lesley, and Heidi also brought up very interesting and valid points regarding social movements and community integration. While they both felt that LGBTQ community is a necessary space and extremely positive, they also believed that cutting one's self off from the general community has negative consequences, and that it is important to include allies in queer spaces as well.

"We look for too much support I find. Yeah it's good to have a sense of community, you need a sense of community, but I feel like we depend on that and we share our issues too much"

"I worry that people who don't identify as male or female, they go through that process so much and they get so used to how ok and comfortable everybody in the community is that they stop exploring outside of the community...it's like they get this process embedded in them and then they don't know how to move outside of the community and how to have a working relationship outside of it...like people in the LGBTQ community aren't necessarily always LGBTQ, sometimes they're just friends of, or it's an interest of...it's the same thing as having a theatre community, it's still there but it shouldn't be your entire life in my opinion"

“People who don’t identify as queer I find are a part of the queer community just through their support. The allies are very much just as a part of that as people who identify as queer”

All that being said, everyone believes that while problems exist within the LGBTQ community, it is a very accepting and supportive place overall. Ten out of ten people all agreed that the queer community is a much needed safer space and very open in general to individuals of all genders and sexualities. Of course, this community is just like any other community with regards to differences between members, and does have some work to do when it comes to the full acceptance of all genders and sexualities. However, that is inescapable in any situation where large groups of individuals come together, as everyone has different values, opinions, and perspectives.

“Just because that one thing unites everyone doesn’t mean they actually are united by it. But I think having a shared experience of that group I guess makes you more community minded”

“I think the community’s incredibly supportive...I think that there’s always going to be friction or friendly competition amongst performers or people who have different standpoints on certain issues and people who come from a multitude of backgrounds...but I think overall there is an overwhelming amount of support from people in this community and it’s like a family”

“I’ve seen people that are totally lost until they find a good group of friends that they can relate to, or relate to on just the fact that they’re different from the norm, and I think that that’s something that the community offers, you don’t have to be different in the same way but just the fact that you’re different, you can unite over that”

“We’re not completely there (being united)...I definitely think we should all have the same rights no matter who you’re doing or whatever, we all need the same rights but we don’t all have the same beliefs and we have to respect that from one another”

“Yes, I had the moral support of my family and friends but thank god for the Youth Project, thank god for prideHealth....when you mentioned the community coming together, I feel a smile coming over my face”

“I think broadly speaking, yes, the LGBTQ community or the queer community is supportive of each other, and I think there is kind of this forward momentum that that community always tries to have”

Discussion

“[i]t is understood that the muscle guys don’t like the femmes, and the femmes don’t like the queens, and the queens don’t like the trannies, and we all don’t like the dykes” (Victoria, from Berkowitz, Belgrave, and Halberstein, 2007, pp.26)

While many authors were part of my extensive literature review regarding the direction of this project, this was the single quote that sparked the fire. I was disheartened, intrigued, and doubtful after reading it, just to name a few. As I am a young, white, able bodied, educated, cis-het female, I had always navigated through queer spaces as such. Unfortunately, I can never entirely let go of those identities and the assumptions they lead me to make. That being said, I learned a great deal about a large number of intersecting identities as a result of this project and conversations I had for it. The themes I uncovered through my initial readings and the conversations with those who were so generous to donate their time and stories in the hopes of reaching others have shed light on what it means to be a queer member in the queer community in a way that past research in this area has failed to do.

Some may believe that I have no right to head a project such as this because of my particular identities. I myself wondered how willing my participants would be to discuss rather sensitive areas of their lives. However, it is clear from my interviews that the vast majority of my participants were comfortable enough to share their personal stories with me, some of whom I met for the first time just minutes before the interview. The conversations I had with these ten inspiring individuals allowed me to compare their

experiences, thoughts, and opinions to the existing research and themes that initially drove this project.

When Giwa and Greensmith (2012) discussed the queer community with their participants, they sensed that the term ‘community’ might not always be an appropriate descriptor, as the LGBTQ community is not necessarily united and is certainly not homogenous. That being said, it is important to understand that a community does not have to be any of those things. They certainly exist, and can be a very important facet of our lives, as there are a vast number of communities we interact with each day, ranging from the political to the student to the local community. With the advent of the Internet, we have been given the ability to find others who share our interests, beliefs, and experiences, even if they live on the other side of the planet. We can create forums and support groups and have discussions regarding various topics with anyone who has access to the World Wide Web. While this requires a certain type of privilege not accessible to all, it has certainly made our world a little bit smaller, and those with non-normative identities a little less isolated. Therefore, I believe that communities certainly exist today and have many benefits in our modern societies.

That being said, I also believe that the definition and concept of the term ‘community’ needs to be revised. Many of us live in cities with huge populations, making it impossible to know and each and every member of almost any community we may belong to. Also, not all members of a specific community are openly a part of or involved in that community. Regardless of the fact that knowing all the members of any of the communities we belong to is likely impossible due to sheer volume, the definition of ‘knowing’ is arbitrary in today’s modern world. Do you have to meet someone in the

flesh to ‘know’ them? If so, how many times? If you have not seen that person in years, do you still ‘know’ them? If messaging or video chatting via the Internet counts as an valid interaction worthy of ‘knowing’ someone, is there a length of time these interactions must continue for one to cross the threshold from ‘not knowing’ into ‘knowing’? It is clear that the idea of ‘knowing’ someone is impossible to define and we should not take much stock its current definitions.

Another problem with our current concept of ‘community’ is that a community must be homogenous in some way and completely united as a whole. While we understand no two people are alike, we believe that everyone in a particular community must have one thing in common, and that one thing must carry the same meaning from person to person. This is not only an unrealistic expectation, but also an unnecessary restriction on who should and should not be considered a member of that community. It is also difficult to clearly outline the demarcations that would identify who should and should not be a member. With regards to the entire community being wholly united, this would require no differences of opinion on any topics that may be connected to the main theme of that community. This is again, unrealistic, but also undesirable when it comes to personal, societal, and global growth and change. Without a differing of opinions, we would fail to have serious discussions regarding sensitive, uncomfortable, or novel topics. Even the harmful and unjust opinions of others can spark positive movements simply by existing. Human rights movements for women, African-Americans, and queer identified folks have all be sparked by the differing of opinions, and while saying that those battles were difficult to fight is an understatement, they were necessary in leading us to where we are today. That is not to say that we should be complacent with our current stance on

those issues or many others; it is simply to say that we may not always want to conform to those around us. People often learn things about themselves by listening to the experiences and opinions of others, however those experiences and opinions must differ from their own in order to spark these thought processes.

In addition to the idea of ‘communities’, Kath Weston’s (1998) views regarding family and kinship was important to this project. She discussed the idea of chosen family and kin and how they differ from our more traditional notions of these concepts. Today, familial ties are much more fluid and voluntary than in the past, due to a variety of reasons. Many of those in the queer community are still disowned by their birth families after coming out, and create ties with others that become just as strong, if not stronger, than blood-related familial ties as a result. Also, instead of moving down the street when one reaches adulthood, they may move across the country or across the world, making the friendships they forge in their new place of residence extremely important and close-knit regardless of their gender and sexuality. The definition of ‘family’ has also changed; we now have more blended families, single-parent families, mixed race or religion families, and queer identified parents and children than ever before. All of these factors have helped blur the lines between who we view as family versus friend, especially in comparison to twenty or thirty years ago.

Based on these few theories, I was interested in asking my participants how inclusive and united they felt the LGBTQ community was. I wanted them to reflect on personal experiences as well as general and overarching attitudes. When it came to the individual themselves, I found that bisexual women have a difficult time navigating through queer spaces. This difficulty stems from assumptions and expectations

surrounding their sexual orientation and how they choose to present it. Bisexuality as an identity can be viewed as an in-between identity of sorts; they are neither gay nor straight, and neither group wants to claim them as a result. The struggle therein lies with our incorrect assumptions that there cannot be any fluidity when it comes to sexuality, so bisexual individuals must be one of two things: gay and in denial, or straight and experimenting. For the majority, we have come to accept those who are completely gay, and have always accepted those who are completely straight, but often believe that those who occupy the grey space in the middle are only fooling themselves. This idea is completely false, as bisexuality is a valid, legitimate identity and deserves to be recognized and taken seriously. Furthermore, sexuality is not stagnant and can change and grow over time. This again delegitimizes the validity of gay-straight binary, as one can either cross between binaries throughout their lifetime or fall on any and all the places within that spectrum.

With regards to their sexuality presentation, bisexual women are expected to prove to the LGBTQ community and the rest of the world that they are in fact queer. When someone tells another that they are straight, they are believed. Similarly, when someone tells another that they are gay or lesbian, they are often also believed. Conversely, when someone tells another that they are bisexual, they are immediately met with suspicion. Others look at that individual and desperately search for any tangible evidence of their bisexuality: short hair if female, gender atypical clothing, tattoos/piercings etc. The idea that any of these attributes are connected to sexuality is outdated of course, but they are searched for nonetheless. When bisexual women lack any or all of the traditional indicators of queerness and are not actively waving a rainbow,

their sexuality is often discredited. This is incredibly frustrating for those who experience it, let alone being mentally and emotionally detrimental. The idea that bisexual women, or anyone for that matter, need to prove that they are queer or present 'queer enough' is nothing short of idiotic. For starters, these are arbitrary terms and phrases that cannot be objectively defined, as clothing and style choices that appear queer to one may not appear queer to the next. Additionally, there should not be an individual responsibility to present as queer in order to validate their sexuality. Our current culture is slowly starting to understand that gender identity and presentation are completely separate constructs; it is time to start applying these same ideas to sexual orientation and presentation as well.

Despite the struggles expressed by the bisexual women I spoke with, every single participant felt that the LGBTQ community was generally a very positive and accepting space. Physical spaces and events geared toward LGBTQ individuals offer support and provide opportunities for discussion, the sharing of experiences, and relationship building. This is extremely important for queer youth, as coming to terms with and understanding one's identities can be difficult at best, especially if their family and friends are not supportive. When people discuss the issues that exist within the LGBTQ community with regards to inclusivity, I believe that they have unrealistic expectations of what it means to be a 'community'. No one would expect any other community to be completely cohesive and free of challenges, yet the queer community is often held to that standard. This may be because the queer community is inherently progressive simply by its very nature, and therefore its members are assumed to be free of social biases and normative patterns of thinking. What we tend to forget is that queer identified individuals were raised in the same culture as everyone else, and cannot escape all the norms and

constructs that have been so heavily engrained in all of us. Whenever people come together, for whatever reason, there will always be those policing other members, and those who do not feel like they truly belong. This needs to be combatted of course; however it is incorrect to assume that any community will be a utopian haven of any kind. With the queer community in particular, there is such a large variation with regards to terminology, definitions, identities, and the visible presentation of these identities that the potential for members to disagree with each other is huge, and that is okay. The problem occurs when harassment, abuse, discrimination, and condemnation occurs based on these disagreements. Luckily, LGBTQ members are speaking out against the norms that surround gender and sexual identities and presentations to widen the views regarding what it means to be queer in all spaces.

Conclusion

Prior to conducting these interviews with the ten diverse individuals who participated, I did not truly grasp how complicated and sometimes controversial gender and sexuality are within the queer community. While this community is certainly more progressive than the general community, it still wrestles with certain ideas of what gender and sexuality should be and what are considered to be appropriate ways to express those identities. This is likely because the LGBTQ community is not isolated from the culture it exists in; it is subject to the same norms and mores as any other community. We are exposed to these cultural constructs since birth, long before many of us consciously realize and reflect on our gender and sexual identities. Therefore, by the time we figure out who we are and how we want to present that to the world, we are laden with rules and

regulations that hinder our self-expression, or make us question it at the very least. Nearly anyone who grows up in Western culture is exposed to these social conventions, and while they are not impossible to break free from, it takes a lot of persistence and confidence to go against the grain. This is especially true with concepts like gender and sexuality, as they are heavily rooted in our upbringing and lifestyles going back generations, making it even more apparent when someone tries to push those firmly set boundaries.

Again, while the boundaries set within the queer community are more liberal in comparison to the often conservative general public, limitations still exist with regards to gender and sexual identities and expressions. When it comes to gender, it seems to be the proverbial final piece to the progressive puzzle, as it is the newest topic of interest for many human rights activists, allies, and queer identified individuals. We have been fighting for same-sex rights and marriage for decades now, and many countries have been recognizing these unions for years. While we still have some work left to do in the realm of sexual equality, most people are very accepting of those with non-normative sexualities, whereas gender is still heavily debated. Trans* individuals have been around for decades as well, yet they have only recently been living their lives as openly trans*. Countries around the world are slowly starting to recognize gender transitions legally with regards to passports and identification cards instead of simply allowing for name changes. While Canada is still not fully funding all sex reassignment surgeries (SRS) as of yet, we are moving in that direction and will likely reach that point in due time. If we compare this to same-sex rights, where Canada was the third country on the planet to legalize such unions almost a decade ago, there is hope that we will fully fund SRS

sooner rather than later.

This hesitancy to recognize transgender and non-binary identities as well as non-normative gender presentations is carried into the queer community because, as I previously mentioned, they are subject to the same cultural norms as anyone else. There is still an element of transphobia that exists within the queer community, and a reluctance to accept those who identify as gender fluid, gender queer, or non-binary. One participant mentioned not liking the term ‘they’ as a pronoun as it felt to her as though those individuals were “hiding between genders”. However, she went on to say that she would use that pronoun if it were what somebody prefers as she is respectful and understanding, even if she does not personally agree with the term. This did not come across to me as a malicious act of hate towards gender fluid/queer individuals; she was very clear that she would make a conscious effort to address people in their preferred pronoun. Instead, I believe this to be a perfect example of how pervasive the gender binary is. It is beyond difficult for many individuals to picture not identifying with any gender, regardless of whether that gender was assigned at birth or not. Asking people their preferred pronoun is not commonplace outside the queer community, and being asked to be referred to as ‘they’ and ‘them’ is even less so. Therefore, even LGBTQ members can have difficulty grasping this concept, because they have been taught since birth that there are two genders: male and female. While transphobia certainly exists, it can be easier to comprehend transitioning from one gender to the other, because they are still identifying with one of the two accepted genders we have created. Compare that to those who identify as gender fluid/queer/non-binary, who often do not identify strongly with either gender, or identify strongly with both genders. This goes against what we consider to be

‘normal’ with regards to gender, and as many of us identify very strongly with one gender over another, it is hard to imagine identifying with both or neither. The gender binary is likely one of the strongest and most pervasive concepts in Western culture, and for many of us, our gender is a large part of who we are, even if we do not lend much thought to it.

This applies not only to identifications with gender, but how we chose to present our gender. This is true more so for those who do identify with a particular gender, whether cis- or trans* in nature. Gender presentation is a huge issue, and while it is not quite as rigid as the gender binary, there are certainly expectations regarding how one should present if they identify as male or female, and very few of those expectations are shared between both genders. If you are female identified, you are expected to present as such, which means adorning certain types of clothing, jewelry, and hair styles that have come to represent what is considered stereotypically feminine, and the same concept applies to male identified individuals. Therefore, being a trans* male or trans* female is acceptable as long as you are presenting your ‘new’ gender appropriately. This is problematic when we consider how greatly gender affects us in our daily lives, and how debilitating it can be when our gender identity is not validated or recognized by others. One reason we may be so married to the concept of a gender binary and the stereotypical expressions of it is because we want to remove any guesswork out of the equation. Most of us do not want to offend or hurt another person, and we become nervous in situations where it is possible to misgender someone. However, many of those with ambiguous gender presentations or who identify as non-binary would be happy to tell you their preferred pronoun if asked politely. Furthermore, assuming or guessing could result in the

misgendering of that person; a much more harmful act than a simple question that is aimed to address them properly and comes from a place of good intent and respect.

Many of my participants had stronger identifications with their gender in comparison to their sexuality for a variety of reasons. For some, it is a vehicle for self-expression, as our gender presentation is visible to the world, even though our gender identification may not be so obvious or clear cut. Others have questioned their gender less than their sexuality, and this stability has resulted in a stronger identification with gender, as it has never really wavered. Finally, while gender may not be necessarily a stronger identity for some, they are currently focusing on and experimenting with their gender and gender presentation and have already dealt with all the questions surrounding their sexuality. Therefore, they feel like gender is currently more pertinent as they are still figuring out what works for them. Many of my participants do not feel as though their sexuality is that important to their sense of self when compared to gender. Their sexual preferences and behaviors are private and personal for the most part, and do not function as forms of individualism and creativity in the same way that gender can and often does. As a result, their gender is stronger because it tells the world something about them, whereas their sexuality falls short in that regard.

Furthermore, unlike gender, sexuality seems to have the power to overshadow all other characteristics of a person. Understandably, people do not want to be defined by or reduced to whom they chose to sleep with behind closed doors. We are of course more than just a gendered entity as well, however most people would not minimize their friends' identity by saying 'this is my male friend Charlie' or 'this is my female friend Jessica', yet we constantly hear people referring to others as their 'gay friend Charlie' or

their ‘gay friend Jessica’. By doing this, we are basically saying that that one’s sexuality trumps and negates any other identity they possess, be it a student, friend, sibling, parent, or any other identification they have. Therefore, it stands to reason that members of the queer community are moving away from their identifications with their sexuality in an attempt to remind the world that they are so much more than LGBTQ identified people. Also, heterosexual identified individuals would likely list a plethora of identities that are important to them and none of them would be the fact that they are straight; why would we expect anything different from those who identify as queer?

That being said, sexuality is still an important facet of our lives, making it frustrating and hurtful when others do not validate our sexual identities. We are a social species, and while we preach individualism and promote being true to one’s self, we still feel a strong desire to be recognized by others. It was clear by my conversations with the bisexual women in my project that the difficulty they had ‘convincing’ people of their bisexuality was frustrating, whether it was based on their gender/sexuality presentation or their lack of experience. They all presented rather feminine and heterosexual, leaving people to question ‘how queer’ they really were. Ky even mentioned that her smaller sexual experiences with women were not taken seriously, and that she “had to seal the deal and actually lick someone’s vagina” before people began to trust that she was in fact bi. In comparison, straight people are never questioned about how much sexual experience they have with the opposite sex or scrutinized because of their presentation; they are simply believed for their self-identification.

This led me to the idea of ‘sexuality presentation’ that was separate from gender presentation. Previously, it would have been assumed that one’s gender presentation was

effecting how others viewed their sexuality. In my opinion, gender and sexuality are different constructs and identities, and using the phrase ‘gender presentation’ to discuss how people infer one’s sexuality seemed flawed to me. No one was questioning the gender identity of Ky, Poppy, and Iris based on their gender presentation. However, they were questioned on their sexuality because they did not present this identity in a stereotypically queer fashion. Similar to how identifying as male is not enough, you have to present as male in order to be seen by others as male, identifying as bisexual is not enough, you must present as bisexual as well. This even carries into the gay and lesbian world specifically, as comments such as “he presented himself more as a straight guy” and “lipstick lesbian” came up in my conversations with participants. These comments were not meant to degrade or disrespect anyone, but in fact show that sexuality presentation is something we look for when trying to determine if someone is gay or straight. This is similar to gender and gender presentation; if someone’s sexuality does not match their sexuality presentation, we are either confused or hesitant to believe that they identify with the sexuality they claim to. As I mentioned above with regards to gender, people often avoid asking questions about ones sexuality out of fear of offending them, and sometimes those questions are inappropriate or simply none of that persons business. However, I would rather be asked politely and appropriately about my sexuality or gender rather than have inaccurate assumptions made about my identities that are based on arbitrary and aesthetic expressions of them.

Having people think and talk about their gender and sexuality served as a launching point into one of my main topics of interest: male privilege in the LGBTQ community. I asked my participants about male privilege in general and how it affected

them in their daily lives. Most everyone was in agreement that it was the idea that men receive more opportunities than women, but only a few touched on the broader implications of male privilege, such as domestic violence and wage disparities. Furthermore, it was very difficult for anyone to come up with a concrete example of how male privilege effects or has ever effected them. This may be partly due to being asked on the spot to describe a related experience; however I feel that it is also an indication of how normalized and subtle male privilege is today. Women legally have all the same rights as men in Canada and we are constantly promoting gender equality in institutions such as academia and the workplace. Despite that, a hierarchy still exists, with men occupying the top positions. Male privilege can be deconstructed even further to look at the hierarchy that exists between men as well. Not all men are treated equally, as masculinity has a huge effect on one's level of 'maleness'. Kimberly even felt less privileged as a gay man than she does now as a trans* women, showing that simply being male is not sufficient to benefit from male privilege. Sexuality is not the only factor, as men can be less privileged based on their race, religion, disability status, and a plethora of other factors. Therefore, it is important to continue to address the concept of male privilege as it is still prevalent and has negative effects for many groups, not simply those who identify as female or are assigned female at birth.

While I was fully aware of the pervasiveness of male privilege in our culture, I wanted to see how it affected individuals in the queer community specifically. Male privilege certainly exists there as well, with the Pride Parade being a good example of this. While Pride initially began as an activist movement to raise awareness and acceptance of those with non-normative genders and sexualities, it has become much

more commercialized and corporatized over the years and is heavily geared toward attractive, white, gay men of a certain social standing. However, in Halifax, there is now a weeklong event known as the Rad Pride Collective, that occurs the same week as Pride Week and is aimed more toward queer and trans* identified individuals in an effort to combat what has become known as 'mainstream Pride'. Also, when it comes to drag in Halifax, queens have much more notoriety than kings do, and often receive more bookings. While drag queens are presenting as female during shows, many of them identify as male in their daily lives. Drag kings are quickly becoming more prominent, however as Heidi mentions, they still struggle to make a name for themselves, indicating that male privilege does exist within the drag community specifically. It is yet another example of women having to work harder to get the same opportunities and levels of success as men, let alone surpass them.

Another interesting topic was brought up regarding gay men's access to female's bodies. Some women felt that because gay men are not interested in them sexually, that inappropriate touching or grabbing is perceived by others as acceptable because there is no 'real' danger involved. Gay men are assumed to be very unlikely to actually rape or sexually assault a female, and therefore touching a female without her consent is just for play or conducted in a joking matter. This can make some women really uncomfortable as they may feel as though their autonomy has been revoked. That being said, it was mentioned that this was most likely a subconscious act, and the offending individual would probably stop doing it if they knew it was bothersome to women. I agree with regards to the lack of awareness among queer men; I believe that this is another example of male privilege its level of power. I think that we focus a lot on sexual assault and rape,

which of course is a necessary action, however we focus less on simple inappropriate conduct when it comes to women's bodies. Even if there is no intent to physically or sexually harm a woman, inappropriate touching is considered sexual assault, regardless of the intent behind it or whether or not that is as far as it will go. I think we need to continue to educate everyone on male privilege, and how it affects men's behaviour as well, not just women's opportunities. Men are conditioned to behave this way, and while they are capable of making their own decisions, it is hard to behave differently when that is all you have ever known. Therefore, while men are often the beneficiaries of male privilege, I think it has many negative effects with regards to their behaviour and patterns of thinking, which are often ignored in the fight for gender equality. I do not believe we will ever truly combat male privilege until we acknowledge and address how negatively it affects everyone, not just female identified individuals.

While my discussions on male privilege in the LGBTQ community were one of the biggest parts of this project, I was also interested in how one's identities and the presentation of those identities affected their membership within that community. A few overarching themes emerged regarding the level of inclusion and acceptance within the queer community. Bisexuality has a stigma attached to it, as some still consider it to be rooted in a lack of commitment to a single sexuality. Those who identify as gay or straight are assumed to have made a 'choice' regarding the gender they are attracted to, while bi- individuals are viewed as on the fence. They are either afraid to come out as completely gay or they are simply experimenting for attention. Bi- women also have a difficult time navigating the space within the queer community because they can be positioned in the queer and straight communities simultaneously, as the gender of their

partner will dictate how people view them. Therefore, they are left in a membership-limbo of sorts, as they are often assumed to be gay and straight at various times throughout their life. This leaves bi- women, and possibly bi- men as well, feeling a lack of acceptance from both communities as neither really wants to claim them.

The bisexual women I talked to also have difficulty in the LGBTQ community specifically because of their sexuality presentation. Ky, Iris, and Poppy do not present as overly queer, and their sexuality is not taken seriously as a result. Heidi did not present as overly queer either, however she was much more heavily involved in the queer community and preformed as a drag king, which likely gave her more credibility as a queer person. This was interesting for a number of reasons. Primarily, who decides what is 'queer' and what are those decisions based upon? How is it determined that a certain fabric, style, pattern, color, or hairstyle dictates a certain level of queerness? The idea that many people are being treated in one way or another based solely on arbitrary style choices is problematic; one's style often changes throughout their lifetime and even day by day. As a result, using ones aesthetic choices as a foundation for assuming their sexuality is unreliable at best, as they are not indicators of each other. Pressuring others to be 'queerer' is unwarranted not only because it is harmful to those who are feeling the pressure, but also because the idea of what is considered 'queer' is subject to change, making it a random marker that results in real frustration for those confronted about it.

The idea that some people do not feel fully accepted into the queer community based on their identities or identity presentations is one of the reasons that kept them from being involved in that community. The bisexual women in particular felt intimidated by those who identified as gay and/or presented as queer, which made them

hesitant to immerse themselves into the LGBTQ community. However, there were other reasons for why people were not as involved in the queer community as I would have assumed. Familial support has a huge impact on how we see ourselves, regardless of our identities or choices. Most of the people in my project were completely accepted by the majority of their family members, whether that acceptance was immediate or occurred with time. It was common that people did not need the support from the queer community specifically because they had support in their daily lives from their family and close friends. That being said, many of them wanted the support of the queer community, as they wanted to be more involved. Others did not feel comfortable being social activists on a regular basis and shied away from the queer community as a result. This was something I understood fully as a feminist, as I prefer to rally and participate in events that are very important to me, rather than being involved in everything. I, like some queer community members, have caught flack for not being a stronger activist, however it is simply not in my personality to do so, nor do I have a lot of time to dedicate to each and every cause. This is most likely an issue that arises in any activist community that is pushing for social change. We need to remind ourselves to respect the boundaries of others, and while we definitely need social activists to raise awareness through rallies and protests, everyone has different interests and priorities. Some will fight vehemently for one cause while not being interested in the next one, and others will dedicate their lives to supporting every cause they can. Neither approach makes one more or less of an activist.

That being said, the one thing that every participant agreed on was the fact that the queer community is a very accepting space overall. While this community is not perfect, no community is, and the fact that a safer space exists for individuals grappling

with their gender and sexual identities is a lifesaver in many cases. Whether one starts to question or experiment with their gender or sexuality at a young age or much later in life, it is important that there is a place to access information, receive professional support, or simply talk to others who have been or are currently going through similar experiences. That being said, completely isolating yourself from the community at large was considered by some as a poor idea, as there is plenty of support one can receive from those they meet through other avenues. I would have to agree with this, and I believe the idea extends past the LGBTQ community and can be applied to any community that we find ourselves involved in. There are so many facets to our personalities and we all have a large variety of things that peak our interest. Therefore, it seems illogical to reduce us to one or two identities and communities, regardless of what they are, as it is not an effective way to experience new things or reach our full potential.

Limitations

While my project was well received by those who chose to participate, there were certainly some flaws with its methodology. I had a wide range of relationships with participants; some I knew very well, others were acquaintances through my relationships with the first few, and still others I met for the first time at the interview itself. This could have affected my data in different ways. Those who I had built close friendships with over the years may have been more comfortable talking to me as there was an element of trust. However, that could have worked against me if those same individuals wanted me to continue to view them in the same way before and after the interview, which would lead to socially desirable responses. While I believe that was not an issue in this case, it is

certainly a possibility and something worth mentioning. Those who I met only at the time of the interview may have been inhibited by a lack of relationship and sense of trust. I was asking very personal questions about their gender and sexuality which can be triggering for some. Again, I did not feel this was a problem in my particular project and with those specific people, however it is difficult to know for sure. The individuals that I had friendly but not overly close relationships with may have been the group with the biggest limitations. They fell in the middle; they likely did not have a huge sense of trust in me yet they knew they would see me in the future. Therefore, they would be the most likely group to provide socially desirable answers or be hesitant to fully delve into personal matters. It seemed that those who I knew casually had the shortest interviews. This could be because they are simply shier, quieter individuals or it could be because our relationship fell into that middle ground.

Aside from the different relationships I had with my participants, the number of participants itself could have posed a problem. While Halifax is the biggest city within the Atlantic Provinces, it pales in comparison to other Canadian cities like Toronto or Vancouver. Therefore, I did not have as large of a participant pool as I would have had in a bigger city. It also would have been helpful to have a number of individuals who identified similarly, such as numerous trans* men or numerous gender non-binary folks, to see if their experiences were similar. Also, I did not have any bisexual men in my project. That being said, I did have the opportunity to talk to people with a wide range of identities when one considers the sample size, which gave my project some breadth.

Finally, my own personal identities may have been a hindrance in my project, regardless of the identities of my participants. As a straight, cis-gendered female who

presents stereotypically as such, I may have been viewed simply as a curious outsider, rather than an ally and supporter. My passion for equal rights and opportunity for those with non-normative genders and sexualities could have been received as pity or the desire to 'save' this particular community. Neither of these are accurate portrayals, as I believe the queer community can successfully fight their own battles. My goal is simply to contribute to the battle in a positive way and do what I can to educate others on things like proper pronouns and lived names, as these are fairly new concepts with regards to mainstream culture. However, my identities may have prevented me from getting more participants, as some did not respond to my invitation to chat. Luckily, those who did agree to be interviewed were extremely engaged and forthcoming, and many participants passed my name on to friends who they thought may be interested, increasing my participant count and giving me the opportunity to meet some incredible people.

Implications and Future Research

This project was important in a number of ways and truly became more than a thesis. I felt a connection with everyone I spoke with and could not be more grateful to them for sharing their stories and experiences. While there were some flaws with this project, it was successful in many ways and resulted in a lot of discussions that were not being had beforehand. Furthermore, it is a launching point for future research; as this was one of the first projects of its kind in Canada, there is plenty of room to expand and improve upon this topic.

First and foremost, this study taught us a great deal about how the queer community functions as its own entity that is embedded within the greater community of

Halifax and even within Canadian culture as a whole. Throughout my conversations, it became clear that the LGBTQ community possesses the same characteristics of any other community. It differs with regards to its compellation and is susceptible to and influenced by our cultural norms and mores. This will continue as long as the queer community operates within the system at large, which is impossible to avoid. Therefore, combatting things like gender and sexual binaries and male privilege must take place at the cultural and societal level; targeting individual populations or communities is almost useless if norms are still being maintained at the highest points of influence.

The idea that the queer community is affected heavily by the culture it is found in is not surprising. Identified members and allies are exposed to the same constructs and pressures as everyone else, making them just as likely to uphold certain norms. Male privilege is very much a problem in Western culture, and the queer community wrestles with it as well, even if it is in slightly different ways. Identity presentation, with regards to both gender and sexuality, is heavily policed in the general community. The fact that these constructs are also monitored within the LGBTQ community is no coincidence; rules and regulations trickle down from the top tier to affect every group and subgroup underneath. Similarly, the idea that the queer community would be one cohesive whole is illogical when one considers the dynamics of any other group. Groups of people who are brought together because of related interests, identities, or experiences are still composed of single individuals with a plethora of experiences, upbringings, beliefs, and values. Expecting them to agree on all aspects that are related to that one common thread is unrealistic and undesirable. It is that differing of opinions that provides a space for critical discussions and progressive thinking as well as the opportunity to learn from your

peers. Without disparities among members, a community would become stagnant and antiquated over time, which is certainly not what we want from the queer community.

To prevent this from happening, it is important to understand what a community is and how it works. Oxford Dictionaries defines ‘community’ as “a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common” (n.d.). Therefore, it is not a requirement for all members of a particular community to know each other personally in order to be a true community. According to this definition, the LGBTQ community is without a doubt a valid community, as they all have wrestled with North America’s conservative norms regarding gender and sexuality. The allies and feminists fit here too, as they often want equal rights and treatment for those of all genders and sexualities, which is a shared interest with queer community members. Also, when we look at the definition again, there is no mention of a community having to be completely cohesive or all members having to share each other’s viewpoints and values. It is actually that conflict of values and beliefs that allows the community to grow in number and evolve over time. Conflict also ensures that the queer community continues to move forward and support a variety of events, movements, charities, and causes. Without differing of opinions, there would be no motivation or momentum to push for change, both within the queer community and the community at large.

Along with activism, research is a great tool that has the ability to shed light upon a number of issues. It is not only useful for determining what we are doing wrong, but also what we are doing right, which can help us put our time and energy into the areas that are problematic. For example, very little research is done on trans* populations, whether trans* men or women. Future research needs to focus on trans* issues, such as

the idea of a hierarchy and male privilege existing among the trans* community specifically. We should talk about differences and hierarchies between those who choose to have surgeries and hormone replacement therapy in comparison to those who opt for hormones alone and those who do not undergo any medical intervention. We also should be looking at effective ways to help trans* individuals and their families come to terms and deal with the fact that they are transgender while supporting them throughout the transition process. It would be interesting to focus solely on trans* individuals' experiences with male privilege as not many people have experienced being perceived as each gender. Finally, we need to continue to combat the patriarchy and transphobia that exists inside and outside the queer community if we hope to make strides for human equity and equality.

Aside from trans* populations, investigating the idea of sexuality presentation is necessary if I am to confirm that it is a true construct. It would be interesting to ask queer members and even heterosexual individuals how they feel they present their sexuality and how they believe those with other sexual orientations would or should present theirs. It would be interesting to show people pictures of individuals stereotypically dressed in a particular style and gauge others reactions and responses. Bi- women and men in particular would be an interesting group to investigate, as presenting 'queer enough' was a huge issue for the bi- women in my project. Therefore, simply looking into the concept of being 'queer enough' could also be a potential research project. Stemming from that idea, one could investigate the masculinity ladder in the queer community. A project could focus on queer men specifically or look at the concept of a masculinity ladder within the entire LGBTQ community. Allies were mentioned as being part of the queer community

in my project; it would be interesting to see how allies view themselves within the context of that community and how queer members view them as well. Finally, the support from ones family and friends was paramount for the majority of my participants. It allowed them to be proud of their identities; the feeling of unconditional love and support that is characteristic of close family and friends gave them strength. Thus, research should look into those who had the support from their family and friends and those who did not, to see how that affects their identities and self-confidence. It is important that we develop ways to educate parents and friends on how to handle the coming out or transition period of those close to them and how to have respectful and calm discussions regarding it.

If any of these ideas were carried out, I would be curious to compare the results or responses to my own. This project highlighted some of the challenges that queer community members face within their own community and from their own peers. However, this project also reminded us that the LGBTQ community is just like any other community; while it has some issues that must be addressed, it is an incredibly supportive and accepting space overall. Furthermore, many of these issues are simply symptoms of the larger cultural issues that exist, such as male privilege and binary policing. Even though some people did not utilize the services and support provided by the queer community as much as others, it is safe to assume that anyone who identifies as a member of the queer community would take comfort in knowing that the community is there in the event they need it. Without this safer space, many individuals would have felt alone during their coming out or transition process, which could have meant the difference between life and death. It is important that queer identified individuals and

allies become involved with the community while still engaging in other communities that they belong to; not only to educate and inform others but also to make the most of their other interests and abilities. Hopefully we can continue to push for changes not only in the queer community itself but also in Western culture as a whole to combat male privilege and achieve equal rights and opportunity for everyone.

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