Who's Here? Who's Queer?

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Welcome to the 2021 special edition of *Intersectional Perspectives: Identity, Culture, and Society*, entitled 'Who's Here? Who's Queer?'. In asking these two questions we are asking who feels they belong in LGBTQI+ spaces and who claims the language of queer.[1] This idea of belonging, and its related concept community, underpins the articles in this special issue. Theoretically we draw on the work of Vanessa May, who states that 'an individual's sense of belonging is affected by collectively negotiated understandings of who 'we' are and what 'we' stand for, and who gets excluded as the 'other''.[2] As May highlights the notion of belonging contains within it the shadow of those that do not belong. A singular understanding of inclusion and exclusion of LGBTQI+ people does not fully account for greater nuance in relational elements of these experiences.[3] Experiences of inclusion and exclusion are necessarily interpersonal, relational, and context-dependent. As such one's inclusion or exclusion depends both on an individual's embodied state, and the relations between individuals, contexts and other agents. Individuals' experiences of being included or excluded vary across settings and times, and a binary concept of inclusion or exclusion does not allow for this nuance.[4]

LGBTQI+ Communities

In this special edition, the editors and authors were particularly interested in the negotiations of belonging and inclusion. Jeffrey Weeks has argued that the lesbian and gay community is an 'imagined community'[5] but a necessary fiction that we cannot do without for our own empowerment and the possibilities of lesbian and gay politics.[6] However, as lesbian and gay, and more broadly LGBTQI+ communities, have been researched over the last 20 years, the terminology used to signify queer collectives has significantly expanded (for example using LGBTIQAAAPP+).[7] It remains to be seen however, whether this is reflected in an expanded population, or whether it is

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[1] We are using LGBTQI+ here to signify all people who do not identify as cisgender, non-intersex, heterosexual and/or heteroromantic, and who wish to be considered under the LGBTQI+ umbrella.

[2] Vanessa May, *Connecting self to society: Belonging in a changing world*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

[3] Eleanor Formby, *Exploring LGBT Spaces and Communities. Contrasting Identities, Belongings and Wellbeing* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

[4] Anthony P. Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock, 2013)

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of National*.

[6] Jeffrey Weeks, 'The Idea of a Sexual Community', *Soundings,* 2 (1996), 71-84.

[7] LGBTIQQAAAPP: lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, questioning, asexual, aromantic, ally, pansexual, poly.

primarily a changing linguistic landscape.[8] It was such questions about whether we were witnessing a material or linguistic change in LGBTQI+ communities, or a different type of change altogether, that motivated us to question in this special edition, whether the notion of an LGBTQI+ community was a useful concept, a necessary fiction, an unhelpful construct, or a combination of one or more of these considerations.

The idea of LGBTQI+ spaces and groups as exclusionary is fairly well established:[9] with people of colour,[10] women,[11] trans people,[12] bisexual people,[13] intersex people,[14] disabled people,[15] and working class people,[16] amongst many others, feeling excluded in exactly the kinds of spaces and collectives where they had hoped to feel at home. This issue has particularly been explored in relation to the commercial 'gay scene'.[17]

Whilst many organisations continue to choose to talk about a singular, unified 'LGBT community', it has been argued that in doing so they tend to amplify the voices of the most powerful, and that instead we should understand there to be a plethora of LGBTQI+

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[8] Sara. B Oswalt, Samantha Evans, and Andrea Drott, 'Beyond Alphabet Soup: Helping College Health Professionals Understand Sexual Fluidity', *Journal of American College Health*, 64.6 (2016), 502–8 < https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2016.1170688 >; Leland G Spencer and G Patterson, 'Abridging the Acronym: Neoliberalism and the Proliferation of Identitarian Politics', *Journal of LGBT YouthOnline) Journal*, 14.3 (2017), 296–316 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2017.1324343>.; Susan B. Marine and Z Nicolazzo, 'Names That Matter: Exploring the Tensions of Campus LGBTQ Centers and Trans* Inclusion', *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7.4 (2014), 265-281.

[9] Kath Browne and Leela Bakshi, *Ordinary in Brighton?: LGBT, Activism and the City* (Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

[10] M.J. Dumas, 'Coming out/Coming Home: Black Gay Men on Campus', in *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*, ed. by R Sanlo (Westport CT: Greenwood, 1998); Catherine Fox and Tracy. E. Ore, '(Un) Covering Normalized Gender and Race Subjectivities in LGBT " Safe Spaces "', *Feminst Sudies*, 36.3 (2010), 629–49; Clara Irazábal and Claudia Huerta, 'Intersectionality and Planning at the Margins: LGBTQ Youth of Color in New York', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23.5 (2016), 1–19 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2015.1058755>.

[11] Fox and Ore; Laurel Westbrook, 'Where the Women Aren ' T: Gender Differences in the Use of LGBT Resources on College Campuses', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 6.4 (2009), 369–94 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361650903295769>.

[12] Kath Browne and Jason Lim, 'Trans Lives in the "Gay Capital of the UK"', *Gender, Place & Culture*, 17.5 (2010), 615–33 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2010.503118>; Dean Spade, 'Fighting to Win', in *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), pp. 47–53.

1. [13] Carola Towle, 'Highlighting the B in LGBT: The Experiences of One U.K . Trade Union', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 11.2–3 (2011), 317–19 <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2011.572008>.

[14] Alyson K. Spurgas, '(Un)Queering Identity: The Biosocial Production of Intersex/DSD', in *Critical Intersex*, ed. by Morgan Holmes (Surrey: Ashgate 2009), pp. 97-122.

[15] Thomas Scott Duke, 'Lesbian , Gay , Bisexual , and Transgender Youth with Disabilities: A Meta-Synthesis', *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 8.1 (2011), 1–52 <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2011.519181>.

[16] Irazábal and Huerta; Yvette Taylor, '"That's Not Really My Scene": Working-Class Lesbians in (and Out of) Place', *Sexualities*, 11.5 (2008).

[17] Gill Valentine and Tracey Skelton, 'Finding Oneself , Losing Oneself: The Lesbian and Gay ` Scene ' as a Paradoxical Space *', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27.4 (2003), 849–66.

communities.[18] However, at the same time as we have seen this recognition of exclusion, the terminology people use to describe their gender identities and sexual orientations has expanded,[19] and the acronym used in LGBTQI+ spaces has attempted to expand to reflect this.[20] This tension interested us: that LGBTQI+ collectives were simultaneously expanding to include a broader range of identities under the rainbow umbrella, yet at the same time it seemed that this collective term was failing in a range of ways to sufficiently and equally include the multitude of identities within it.[21] Yet still there is a sense that even those who experience exclusion are still invested in the existence of a united collective.[22]

The simultaneous refusal of identity categories with the use of queer and the way in which in practice the use of queer has led to ever smaller bounded identity categories is not a new consideration but the queer of 2020 brings a new set of tensions. Some of the most apparent ways in which these tensions have played out have been through the developing relationships between lesbian and gay, LGBT and queer activisms.[23] As Brown summarises 'despite queer activism's suspicion of rights claims based on bounded identity categories, queer political movements have played a part in accelerating the articulation of rights claims based on trans, bisexual and asexual identities over the last two decades'.[24] While queer for some may be a rejection of identity politics there is a queer practice that posits queer as an identity.[25] Yekami et al add that 'queer activisms also struggle with how to set an agenda for an acting queer "we"—a "we" that has never been uniform, stable or definable. So while activism might do away with identities, it still relies on agents and agency'.[26] In asking 'who is here?' and 'who is queer?' we are specifically asking which individuals feel they can lay claim to queer as an identity and asking who feels queer is a useful term for them in approaching the world.

[18] Robert Mills, 'Bisexual and Transgender Histories Queer Is Here? Lesbian , Gay , and Public Culture', *History Workshop Journal*, 62 (2006), 253–63 <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbl006>; Formby; Spencer and Patterson.

[19] Hélène Frohard-Dourlent and others, '"I Would Have Preferred More Options": Accounting for Non-Binary Youth in Health Research', *Nursing Inquiry*, 24.1 (2017), 1–9 <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12150>; Bróna Nic Giolla Easpaig and Rachael Fox, 'Young People's Experiences of Negotiating Health Care Services in Relation to Sexual and Gender Identities: A Community-Based Approach to Service Improvement.', *Psychology of Sexualities Review*, 8.1 (2017), 39–52.

[20] Spencer and Patterson.

[21] Marine and Nicolazzo

[22] Weeks.

[23] Joshua Gamson, 'Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct? A Queer Dilemma', *Social problems,* 42 (1995), 390-407.

[24] Gavin Brown, 'Queer Movement', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism,* ed. by David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 73-86, p. 74.

[25] Sara Ahmed, "Interview with Judith Butler." *Sexualities* 19: 4 (2016) 482-492.

[26] Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian, and Beatrice Michaelis, 'Introducing Queer Futures', in *Queer Futures*, ed. by Elahe Haschemi Yekani, Eveline Kilian and Beatrice Michaelis (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-15, p. 3.

To explore these contestations, our call for papers sought to explore notions of togetherness in LGBTQI+ spaces, places, groupings and organisations, along with experiences of inclusion and exclusion within and outwith queer boundaries. We were keen to understand what binds LGBTQI+ identities together, and whether these ties remain useful in the contemporary context. In keeping with the spirit of the journal and the special edition, we aimed to attract a range of scholars, and community members from across disciplinary boundaries, and were delighted by the volume of proposals we received for 'Who's Here? Who's Queer?' indicating that this was a topic cared about amongst LGBTQI+ scholars and community members. In this edition you will find four of these articles around two primary themes: safety and in/visibilities. We will introduce each of these articles individually, and discuss how they fit our central theme.

Introducing the Articles

The edition begins with two papers exploring notions of 'safe spaces'. The concept of 'safe spaces' has garnered wide-reaching interest in recent years, with a particular focus on the ways in which cities have been a key site for claiming space through queer and LGBTQI+ activism[27]. More broadly 'safe spaces' have drawn negative media attention, and have been caricatured as hampering free speech.[28] However, within LGBTQI+ communities, a binary narrative of safe/unsafe based on the presence or absence of queerphobia has been queried by those who seek to bring an intersectional lens to the concept of safety.[29] For example, whilst a space free from queerphobia may ensure the inclusion and safety for those whose only experience of oppression is queerphobia, this does not mean that it will be free from other forms of oppression, for example racism or sexism, and thus it might not be safe or inclusive for queer women or queer people of colour.

Exploring the tension between desired inclusion, whilst experiencing exclusionary barriers, Mara Pieri from the University of Coimbra, considers the accessibility of LGBTQA+ spaces, and the exclusion of chronically ill and disabled LGBTQA+ activists, in 'Elephants in the room. Chronically ill people and access to LGBTQA+ spaces'. Based on a qualitative study using narrative, individual interviews, Pieri provides insight into the experiences of twenty-four LGBTQA+/non-monogamous activists, with lived experience of chronic illness and/or disability from across Portugal and Italy. This paper encourages those organising and participating in LGBTQA+ and non-monogamous collectives to think proactively about the safety, access and inclusion of LGBTQA+ and non-monogamous people who face additional barriers to inclusion in queer spaces, rather than being reactive. In doing so, Pieri pushes us beyond thinking about LGBTQA+/non-

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[27] Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

[28] Ian Dunt, 'Safe Space or Free Speech? The Crisis around Debate at UK Universities', *The Guardian*, 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/06/safe-space-or-free-speech-crisis-debate-uk-universities> [accessed 25 May 2019].

[29] Browne and Bakshi; Formby; Fox and Ore; Westbrook.

monogamous spaces as safe/unsafe based upon a one-dimensional, binary notion of safety, and to think about how other types of exclusion come into play, in this instance focussing on ableism. Pieri's particular focus on activism and compulsory able-bodiedness in activist spaces highlights that 'who is here?' and 'who is queer?' are questions that may contain an absence in their answers. This may suggest that there is also merit in questioning 'Who is not here?' when we think about LGBTQI+ communities. As we consider these questions under the shadow of a global pandemic that is reshaping activist spaces, amongst others, there is much we can learn from Pieri's considerations of the exclusion of chronically ill and disabled LGBTQA+ activists within LGBTQA+ activism.

Following on from this, Giada Bonu from the Scuola Normale Superiore Florence, provides further exploration of the notion of 'safe spaces', examining the resonance of this concept both for queer people and women. 'A Space of One's Own. Queering the Map, Challenging the Borders: the Production of Safe Spaces in Italian Urban Areas', uses interviews with activists from four cities across Italy, to produce counter-maps to challenge and disrupt a dominant passive and defensive construction of 'safe spaces' in Italian urban spaces. Bonu argues that conventional understandings of safety are often constructed through a paternalist lens that reproduces narratives about threats to safety that do not necessarily resonate with women and queer people themselves, and that the construction of their safety should be thought of not simply as individual safety, but collective safety too. In answering 'who's here?' in relation to city spaces as a production of possibilities of space Bonu gives us tools to consider a reimagined space in which the relations that produce that space can come together to build a better space.

Moving on from the concept of safety to notions of in/visibilities, Michael Toze from the University of Lincoln takes a critical life course approach to trans masculinities in 'Invisible Futures: Trans Men and Ageing'. Toze seeks to explore a paradox of invisibility experienced by trans men, whereby recognition as men is often contingent on invisibility as trans people, and thus visibility as trans people can compromise recognition as men. He argues that this invisibility can have legal and political consequences in wider society, but also can invisibilise trans men as activists and their activism in LGBTQI+ spaces. In these spaces, which are often segregated by both age and gender, older trans men may face a range of barriers to inclusion that require skilful navigation to maintain access to LGBTQI+ collectives. In answering 'who's here?' and 'who's queer?' Toze questions whose visibility permits them to be recognised as present and queer within LGBTQI+ spaces. With a particular focus on older trans men Toze highlights the potential problems of intergenerational community relations and language use, as well as the pressing problem of older people's involvement in trans and queer communities and the relative invisibility of older trans men in society.

The theme of visibility and recognition is also explored in '"The whole point is that we're not supposed to look like anything": Non-binary (Un)intelligibility and Carving Out Space in Gender's Border-Zones'. This article takes a critical look at the use of the term 'non-binary' as an

umbrella term, exploring the possibility of viewing it as a defined gender category with permeable boundaries. A. A. McDonald from La Trobe University draws on ten in-depth face-to-face, semi-structured, individual interviews with non-binary people in Melbourne, Australia between 2016 and 2017. McDonald explores the difficulties rendered by the unintelligibility of non-binary identities resulting in invisibility, but the benefits experienced in the absence of a mould or template for how to do your gender. In answering 'who's here' and 'who's queer' McDonald offers us a picture of vulnerability to violence in some scenarios and erasure within queer understandings in other scenarios highlighting that visibility can come with high costs. These considerations echo Foucault's reflection that 'visibility is a trap'[30].

Summary

This special edition's title 'Who's Here? Who's Queer?' aimed to question whether the ever-expanding LGBTQI+ acronym signified a material expansion of LGBTQI+ communities, or whether it was more of a linguistic change. However, the proposals received responding to the call for papers indicated that writers had interest in exploring some more nuanced dynamics of exclusion within LGBTQI+ communities, subverting our questions to focus on those who felt that they faced barriers to being recognised as sufficiently queer and present. The four articles included in this special edition centre upon two themes: safety and visibility. They argue that whilst the visibility of being recognised as queer and present within LGBTQI+ spaces was sometimes presented as ubiquitously desirable, this was not the case for those whose recognition was predicated upon invisibility, or for whom visibility was complicated by a lack of template to follow. Similarly, the notion of 'safe spaces' was problematised as an overly binary concept, concentrating on the protection of queer people from queerphobia, and not taking into account their other intersecting identities, such as their gender or disability. The unifying questions of this special edition were therefore reframed to ask 'Who is not here? Who is not considered sufficiently or appropriately queer?'. We hope that this re-framing helps readers to think about the composition and organisation of their own LGBTQI+ spaces, groups, and organisations, and we give thanks to the labour of the editors, reviewers and writers for helping us reconfigure the questions and with whom it has been a pleasure to write.

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[30] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 200.

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