The Queer Mirror: Reflections of LGBTQIA+ Fractures

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Proposal

Queer inclusivity functions in theory, but not necessarily in practice. I aim to examine gender divisions and hierarchies that may exist or be currently developing within queer spaces. Such divides already exist within the LGBTQIA+ community, forming a basis for comparison. The function of this research would be to both detect and/or correct the formations of gender hierarchies within the queer movement, as well as provide a framework for understanding and erasing fractures in the community. I seek to illuminate gender as a socially-constructed identity, narrowly defined between a two gender binary of male and female. Given personal experiences as a non-binary queer, I suspect that binary gender discourse also dominates trans discourse in queer spaces.

In order to identify the machinations of hierarchies in queer spaces, I ask the following research questions:

- What forms of gender discourse exist within queer spaces?
- Which gender identities become marginalized within queer communities?
- Do queer communities successfully articulate a broad spectrum of gender identities?
- How are issues surrounding agender/non-binary/gender non-conforming individuals addressed within queer spaces?

I propose utilizing ethnographic field notes as an active participant to gather general information about queer spaces. In order to further examine the dynamics of these spaces, I also plan to conduct three semi-structured interviews with people who identify as queer based primarily on their gender identities/performances.
Literature Review

Introduction:

I utilized my first two texts to define queerness as a non-normative state. My second group of texts illuminates the normative queer, as defined by race and gender. I further examine where perspectives of queerness derive from and how visibility and perspectives affect different groups of queers with my third group of texts. In my final grouping of literature, the texts explore the queerness of being non-binary, and how the marginalization of non-binary individuals may develop.

Defining “Queer” as Non-Normative:

Many people equate queerness with gender, sex, and sexuality. However, queer theory also gives us a fourth element: non-normativity. Through the rejection of normative culture, queerness embodies the spirit of difference. In “Queer Identities: Rupturing Identity Categories and Negotiating Meanings of Queer (2005),” Wendy Peters explores the fluid nature of the definition of “queer.” Peters describes “queer” as an umbrella term for many variations of identities, allowing for the removal of unnecessary complexities in defining individual identities. Queerness, according to Peters can vary from gender, sexuality, and sex to non-normative actions, behaviors, and ideologies. The fluidity of queerness helps people confined by LGBT identity labels, who may possess one or more fluid identities. Peters utilizes the lived experiences of queers to reinforce the need for queer spaces to accommodate every complexity of non-normative identity. This article strengthens a portrayal of queerness as having no fixed or default identities by validating the non-normativity of queerness. Queer spaces, in theory, abandon the need for a unifying theme beyond non-normative (anything). An ideal queerness could liberate people from the confines of normative identity politics.
Queer defies normativity by illuminating the issues surrounding different identities. In “Compulsory Gender and Transgender Existence: Adrienne Rich’s Queer Possibility (2008),” C. L. Cole and Shannon Cate explore the nature of LGBTQIA+ identity categories through Adrienne Rich’s denaturalizing of heterosexuality. Rich originally argued for a continuum of lesbian, rather than a sexual binary. Cole and Cate breakdown sexuality’s utility by describing how sex and gender determine sexuality, but sex and gender are not necessarily connected. The male identification of lesbians as a social practice, for example, reproduces homonormativity and actually erases lesbians as the combination of womanhood and femininity, loving womanhood and femininity. The authors further argue that the diversity within each identity necessitates movements based around bringing benefits to all members, rather than in aligning with a narrow definition in order to accomplish goals. Like Peters, Cole and Cate show queerness as the refuge from the divisions and stratifications surrounding identities in LGBTQIA+ categories. Although Peters directly acknowledges the non-normativity of queerness, Cole and Cate entertain a more radical agenda in dismantling identities in the queer movement entirely. Defining queer movements requires identities with which to define queer for the purposes of inclusion/exclusion. They desire the ideal, queer norm as a unifying identity. Unfortunately, many queer spaces develop troubling normative identities.

**White Masculinity as the Default:**

The normative culture born from non-normative queer culture actually defines itself via the same racial and gender norms of contemporary American society; namely whiteness and maleness. Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep discusses the privileging of masculine gender traits in their dissertation, “Marginalization among the Marginalized: Gay Men’s Negative Attitudes Toward Effeminacy (2001).” Taywaditep examines how and why gender discrimination occurs within
cisgender gay men. The author distinguishes effeminacy in gay male adults as a state-like function, rather than the trait-like function of femininity in women and transwomen. The men in the study were asked questions about their ideals regarding hegemonic masculinity, in order to profile them all based on a Hegemonic Masculinity Index (HMI). Taywaditep shows how the HMI is the highest indicator of both masculine gay behavior and discrimination against effeminate gay men. The way in which this article examines hierarchies of gender within cisgender gay men is helpful in showing the universality of the male/female dichotomy in determining stratification of gender. This article also does well to show the domination of hegemonic masculinity in gender discourse and performance. The non-white author actually took care to include a larger percentage of non-white participants in order to try to replicate nationwide racial demographics.

The second article I align with the theme of default identities adds whiteness to the masculine norm. Roksana Badruddoja’s “Queer Spaces, Places, and Gender: The Tropologies of Rupa and Ronica (2008),” follows the lived experiences of two second-generation South Asian queers. Both dealt with issues surrounding their body types and South Asian cultural norms being “too feminine” for the white lesbian spaces in the United States, where masculinity thrives. Their experiences highlight the complexity of dealing with the U.S. articulation of heteronormative patriarchy while simultaneously under the scrutiny of their own cultures’ heteronormative patriarchies. For Rupa and Ronica, queer theory in the United States typically excluded ideas about race and class, favoring gender, sexuality, sex, and even non-normativity and allyship. The purpose of this article is to include a racial analysis of queerness, which also brings some class analysis into consideration. It works well to further show the queer norm of white masculinity, but also brings to mind questions of further forms of non-normativity. Is not
being non-white a non-normative racial state? Does being of a class not seen as the normative American dream of middle to upper class life not count as a non-normative class state?

**Queer Visibility Dynamics:**

Cisgender researchers and queers utilize visibility as a tool for marginalization and policing, shaping the perspectives around gender queers. In “The Transgender Look,” Judith/Jack Halberstam compares three transgender film narratives to discuss trans visibility in the media. The three films Halberstam uses provide distinct perspectives of viewing transgender individuals. In the gaze of cisgender individuals, as told through “The Crying Game” narrative, the transgender body confirms a fantasy of fluidity and transformation. The lesbian-directed “Boys Don’t Cry,” shows the transgender body confirming the enduring power of the binary gender system. Halberstam uses the trans-produced third film, “By Hook or by Crook,” to show how the trans gaze sees the transgender body as a representation of a utopian vision of a world of subcultural possibilities. When not in the hands of trans individuals, portrayals of transgender in the media create narratives of invalidation and essentialization. Halberstam’s analysis of trans visibility also points toward the violence trans people might face in becoming visible. This immediate violence usually pertains to individual visibility, but Halberstam’s analysis of visibility in media may be applied to more recent trans visibility increases. Lavern Cox’s widespread visibility seems to be accompanied by an increase in the violent attacks and murders of transwomen of color, for example. There is a real safety in invisibility that does not receive adequate validation by prideful queer champions of visibility.

Another perspective to consider is the visibility of queers in research. Queer theorists tend to be queer, but a large amount of research being done about queers also tends to be done by non-queer folks. Like queer films, research findings can vary dramatically depending on whether
the researcher is queer or not, and how much queer theory comes into play. In “Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality (2005),” Stephen Valocchi address the issues with sociological studies not taking into account the work of queer scholars and theorists enough. Valocchi outlines the realms of sex, sexuality, gender, and non-normativity within queerness. They also validate the significance of the insights of literary analysis and qualitative methods used by queer researchers, wanting such insights to be included in sociological empirical analyses. The relationship between queer theory and sociology, as promoted by Valocchi, would lend empirical validation to queer theory, while queering sociological studies in order to accurately represent the complexity of queerness. The reciprocal relationship, informing each field of research, expands the possibilities of research through mutual learning. This would particularly be beneficial, given that one of the studies mentioned as more queer actually describes “drag” culture as a positive breakdown of the gender binary. This perspective is “not queer enough,” given that most transgender/gender queer individuals understand drag to be gay men performing something they do not identify with, and as a highly binary act that upholds hegemonic masculinity and mocks femininity. In the case of both articles, clearly the main lessons to be learned are about the visibility and perspectives of the queers being studied/participating in research. Visibility functions as liberation for some queers, and oppression/policing for others, depending upon identity and gender performances.

Non-Binary Gender Marginalization:

Non-binary gender disrupts the social construction of gender through its queer non-normativity, drawing the ire of binary gender queers by threatening the validity of normative binary transgender in the greater cultural context. One might assume that the extreme non-normativity of non-binary gender to be particularly queer. However, non-binary individuals are
often invalidated within queer spaces. Shannon Sullivan utilizes John Dewey’s analyses of
gender habits in cooperation with Judith Butler’s concept of performativity to give a clearer view
of non-binary gender within a cultural/societal context in “Reconfiguring Gender with John
Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change (2000).” Sullivan frames non-binary gender as an
act of triple treachery against three hegemonic binaries – sex, sexuality, and gender – based on
society’s intense linkage of the three. Non-binary gender habits/performances represent the
ultimate disruption of the habits that cultural constructs have etched into one’s body. The deep
grooves formed by binary gender habits, Sullivan argues, are hard to rid oneself of, especially
when considering society’s continued attempts to structure one’s habits. The only way to
successfully restructure habits is to develop new habits to replace the old habits, according to
Sullivan. The author also draws attention to the fluidity of gender in youth, who have not had
habits impressed upon them as deeply yet. Finally, Sullivan asserts that only collective, and not
individual, habit forming can affect cultural structures. In this way, Sullivan strengthens
arguments of the totality of queerness doing away with previous gender habits and restrictions,
because queer definitions will not change by focusing on all of the individual identities as the
LGBT movement does. Naming binary rejection as one of the highest acts of treachery also gives
insight into the marginalization of non-binary individuals.

Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen overtly claim non-binary gender to be the truest
queer expression of gender in “Gender as Multiplicity: Desire, Displacement, Difference, and
Dispersion (2006).” In doing so, they utilize an unconventional metaphor, referring to gender
dynamics through a framework of rhizomatic gender multiplicity. This framework explains that
“gender can be understood as a plane of immanence, intensity and consistency which always and
constantly shifts and realigns – a molecular process characterized by making connections and
forging alliance like a multi-armed chain of molecules” (Linstead). This framework shifts gender from social construction to a social process with clear organization shaping social structures that are both formal and informal. The multiplicity of gender describes its final state as a series of infinite connections between infinite fragmented identities. To simplify, Linseindt and Pullen’s multiplicity is a molecular metaphor for a web-like spectrum of gender, with no identifiable extremes given its deviation from the typical linear spectrum. One of the most profound elements of their argument is the notion that non-binary sexualities and genders are actually more valid and subversive than the medicalized and essentialized gender system in which transgender is also seen as binary and in need of medical intervention. I agree with their assertion that binary systems are a source of latent conflict, alleviated only with the addition of other parties (gender, in this case). The oddity lies in the fact that even the LGBT movement accepts most of its identities as spectrums (in theory, but not always in practice). This point leads to the question: Why, then, are people located in the middle or off of the accepted gender spectrum so vilified in queer spaces?

Breaking down the gender binary for transgender individuals destroys hopes for assimilation and normativity. As somebody who leans more toward a transfeminine gender performance, I have often been told that I would enjoy reading Julia Serano’s memoir, Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity. Serano’s chapter, “Ungendering in Art and Academia (2007),” actually comes off as a blatant assault on non-binary gender. This chapter investigates cisgender portrayals of transgender and intersex individuals in mainstream media. In this regard, Serano’s arguments about trans visibility mirror Halberstam’s views of the gaze. When Serano turns upon research, however, they expose their hatred and biases against non-binary trans individuals. Serano critiques academics utilizing
transsexuals and intersex individuals to further their theories of social construction. In doing so, Serano portrays all researchers as cissexual (cisgender and heterosexual) and critiques the emphasis of using the narratives of non-binary gender. As a non-binary individual seeking to do research on the social construction of gender, I find Serano’s assertions to be untrue and emotionally charged. Binary transgender reifies the “natural” quality of hegemonic gender constructions, so it is strange that Serano would be surprised by their exclusion from social construction research. Serano degrades into a rant, revealing the true nature of their issues with labeling gender as a social construct: the longing for normativity. This rant includes the highly offensive grouping of those “who actively engage in drag, gender bending, and/or who identify outside the male/female binary” into one category. This association in itself shows Serano’s invalidation of non-binary gender. Serano seeks to invalidate such individuals to serve what I am coining as transnormativity, or the desire to assimilate into hegemonic structures and naturalize transgender by conforming to heteronormativity in many of the same ways that homonormativity does. Serano weeps for the lack of coverage around transnormativity, blaming this for trans marginalization. “What regularly goes unreported are the views of transsexuals who are ten or twenty years post-transition, intersex people who have lived fairly gender-normative, heterosexual lives, and transgender people who at one point embraced being “in between” or “outside of” the categories of female or male as part of their coming out experience, but who later came to identify within the male/female binary” (Serano). This sentiment clearly mirrors the dynamics of homonormativity, but for trans individuals (hence transnormativity). My lived experiences and those of queers I know are typically antithetical to Serano’s implication of non-binary gender as a phase of “coming out.” I first identified as a transwoman, but found that category too restrictive of my complex gender identity and evolved away from the binary. Other
trans individuals who perform binary gender have frequently expressed the desire to perform in a more non-binary manner, but fear marginalization. Serano’s memoir offers a wonderful example of the mentality behind the marginalization of non-binary gender queers.

**Conclusion:**

The queer movement suffers from the ailments of individual identity politics often seen in the LGBTQIA+ movement. The emerging queer movement frames white masculinity, whether articulated through a cisgender or transgender binary system, as the default identity unifying its citizenry, as documented through the experiences of feminine and effeminate queers of color. This normative state defines the criteria for the inclusion and exclusion mechanisms of the queer community. It also sets visibility upon its marginalized groups to police them, while using visibility to liberate and praise the normative group. Through most of the articles, despite their foci, queerness shines through as a resilient non-normative force, embodied heavily in the unconventional existence of non-binary gender. This non-normativity naturally forges a movement against the normalizing forces of assimilation. It remains incredibly difficult to find an articulation of queerness in praxis that will satisfy the complexity of any queer identity. My radical queer politics manifest most strongly in queer spaces for people of color, yet my whiteness bars me from such spaces. Within white queer spaces, the assimilation tendencies create hostile environments for non-binary individuals, such as myself. Ultimately, queerness should never be about a main default identity or default identities, with specifications for inclusion and exclusion.
Works Cited


Abstract

Queer spaces provide a community for people whose sexual and gender identities fail to conform to societal normativity. The Queer Movement offers a sense of unity for many types of identities, moving away from the more divided LGBTQAA Movement, which often fails to address the needs of all of the groups it claims to represent. As the Queer Movement continues forward, will it also become fractured by sexualities and gender identities? My research seeks to identify any divisions or hierarchical structuring of gender identity that may be developing or already present within Queer communities. I conduct a critical ethnography on queer spaces and events in order to analyze the discourse surrounding gender identity. I aim to discover which gender identities gain dominance within Queer spaces and how this may marginalize other genders within the Queer Movement. My research will further examine agender and gender-non-conformity within Queer spaces. Does a movement centered around identity (non-normative identity, specifically) allow for easy inclusion of individuals denying gender identity? The mainstream Queer Movement remains fairly young, offering opportunities to study its development and expansion. In a period of discourse surrounding gender inclusivity in Queer Movements and potential gender exclusions, I look to broaden the conversation to include the potential for exclusion of individuals lacking a gender identity. Being an agender individual, I often find myself explaining my lack of gender identity to others who identity as Queer. I intend to identify whether such deficits of knowledge around identity politics exist within the greater movement.
The Queer Mirror: Reflections of LGBTQIA+ Fractures

Introduction

The Queer Movement arose to unite people who found themselves fragmented from each other within the LGBTQIA+ Movement. As such, Queer spaces aim to avoid hierarchies of sex, sexuality, and gender identities. In doing so, these spaces provide a safe zone for people who feel alienated from spaces identified as LGBTQIA+. The shortcomings of LGBTQIA+ spaces manifest in the privileging of cisgender gay and lesbian identities, marginalizing people who identify as bisexual, transgender, intersex, and asexual. Many of the latter identities may find expression and representation within the Queer category, according to theorists. Despite the intentions of Queer theorists, there are those who still find themselves on the outskirts of the Queer community. As one of these Queer outsiders, I found myself interested in the replication of identity hierarchies within Queer spaces. As a scholar, I focus on academic Queer spaces – where the populations at least have access to academic Queer theory – in order to analyze the corruption of Queer theory in translation to Queer practices.

The mirror of “Queerness” reveals dark prognostications, reflecting a fate of fragmentation, as had previously befallen the LGBTQIA+ movement. I identify as a queer based on my gender identity and performance. My identification with non-binary gender falls under scrutiny within LGBTQIA+ spaces. Unfortunately, many non-binary individuals face this same alienation within queer spaces. Queer spaces have fallen victim to the same disease which split apart the identities contained within the cumbersome LGBTQIA+ acronym: cultural nationalism. Like the nation state, the cultural queer nation manifests through defining normativity, marginalizing certain groups, and policing its members.

Methodology
I conduct an ethnography of Queer academic spaces. These spaces are on the campus of a California State University and consist of clubs and activities specifically named as “Queer.” Given my status as genderqueer, I engage with these spaces as an active participant. I observe gender dynamics, hierarchies, and performance, excluding details about sexuality, race, and class where the latter do not directly deal with the former. The majority of my ethnographic field notes surround a club I became involved with that is exclusive to Queer individuals. This differentiates it from Queer spaces that include allies, or Queer spaces specifically intended for people of color.

Within Queer spaces, due to marginalization and a lack of representation, there remain very few transgender or non-binary gender individuals. In order to explore these perspectives, often pushed out from Queer spaces, I further conducted interviews with marginalized gender identities. The combination of ethnography within Queer spaces and the perspectives of Queer outsiders provides a clear illustration of the gender dynamics surrounding Queer theory in practice.

Theoretical Framework

I utilize Queer Theory as it exists in academic discourse – as opposed to practice – to criticize cultural nationalism in the Queer Movement. This Queer theoretical critique of cultural nationalism derives from the most common definitions of “Queerness” as a non-normative state of being. Typically, Queer theory defines non-normativity as it relates to sex, sexuality, and gender. Many definitions of “Queerness” also politically include non-normative actions, behaviors, and ideologies as well. In theory, the Queer is a fluid individual, difficult to contain through normative notions of identity. Who is Queer and welcome in Queer spaces? Obviously, not every person is Queer. In attempting to define “Queerness,” however, many fall into the
trappings of cultural nationalism. During the nation-building process of any culture, the culture must be defined based around inclusions and exclusions of identities. In doing so, cultural nationalism within the Queer movement sets up a sort of Queer criteria. These criteria function as the normative state of Queerness. Theoretical Queerness in its non-normative grounding proves antithetical to the normalizing of a set of Queer characteristics, however. In practice, Queer normalcy runs rampant. “We only have to look at the queer “fanzines” (small independently published magazines devoted to popular actors or music personalities) to realize that virility dominates, notably by the pictorial representation of triumphant penises, the same weapon that heterosexual men use to terrorize women. This is one example among many others which argue against the genuine diffusion of identities that queer theory promises to deliver” (Turcotte). By specifying queer identities and dividing queerness amongst these identities as sanctioned by the queer nation, queerness becomes demarcated and divided. Like the LGBTQIA+ acronym, one may view queerness broken apart into sections, which are then prioritized based on proximity to a fabricated queer normativity. “Queer theory can thus contribute to reinforcing the social categories it denies… At this level, we must not think of queer deconstructing but rather of destroying hierarchical sex, class, and race power relationships” (Turcotte). Creating a normative, dividing queerness simultaneously destroys theoretical queerness. Cultural nationalism victimizes certain groups of queers and maintains heavily-policied borders through normativity. The non-normativity of queer theory calls for all queers to eliminate these nationalist borders within the community, disrupting any notion of a defining queerness.

Visibility Dynamics
Visibility functions as empowerment and liberation, as well as disempowerment and surveillance, depending on gender identity and performance. These dynamics also vary according to who maintains control of the gaze of queer visibility. Some queer identities may fully function invisibly, while some cannot function without visibility. This fundamental difference begins to define variations in visibility dynamics. Some club rules surrounding visibility highlight these differences. “When leaving [a queer space], people who are visibly “out” must respect people who are not “out” by not lingering near them to flag them as queer to their friends who do not know… Anybody who violates the “natural” gender binary openly cannot do so within “the closet.” The only people who remain within the closet are people who are queer based on sexuality and people who are gender queer, yet do not perform their gender identities” (Field Note: 9/30/2014). This rule, in particular, highlights the difference between sexuality and gender identity visibilities. For the form, visibility may be controlled by the individual, while still allowing one to live the experience of their sexual identity within the privacy of the bedroom. In order to hide one’s status as transgender, however, one must perform and live as if ones does not identify as transgender. Some transgender individuals may find it wise and safe, in certain settings, to maintain their trans* invisibility. Expressing oneself as trans* necessitates visibility, whereas sexuality’s visibility may be apparent or hidden without affecting one’s identity. Due to queer marginalization in society, forced visibility may prove damning to gender queers.

Many transgender queers must choose between being true to their gender identity (or lack thereof) and safety from marginalization. Like sexual queers, gender queers may hide their identity, but the latter faces gender dysphoria in doing so. The alienation from oneself created in this gender vanishing act may prove necessary at times, but also damages queers on an emotional
level. One of my interviewees, Red, identifies their struggles with visibility on multiple levels, explaining, “I am not accepted as a queer woman of color. I am misidentified often and/or not properly recognized. In order to navigate, I feel like I need to behave in certain ways that almost make my identities invisible.” Both race and gender identities feature as highly visible, requiring a great deal of care to hide, if hiding these identities even proves possible. There are many reasons for hiding these identities, however, with many of these being necessary to maintain any semblance of success within contemporary American society. Red further describes such experiences, noting, “in more threatening spaces, I introvert myself and don’t care to be recognized because I find that I will be placed at risk of losing something that is valuable to me; in which case is, from experience, risking job loss.” The reality many non-normative genders face is one of surviving through the policing of their gender visibility.

**Masculinity as the Default**

Whether among cisgender heterosexuals, cisgender queers, or transgender queers, masculinity represents the coveted normative state from which all other gender variations deviate. Within the realm of mainstream, heteronormative society, the privileging of masculinity typically draws a lot of attention. The articulation of masculinity as the default, privileged gender state in society inspired numerous articulations of feminism to combat gender inequality. In the gender fluid realm of queerness, stratifying gender should prove rather difficult. With the normalizing of masculinity within queer spaces as well, easily-predictable patterns of gender hierarchy fall into place. Within queer spaces, I found the gender demographics to be indicative of masculine privilege. The queer club that serves as the focus on my ethnography was composed of approximately ten cisgender males out of a total of fifteen general members during the first meeting. My second club meeting, I note that “moving inside of the classroom, there are
again about fifteen people attending the meeting. About nine of them appear to be new faces who did not come the week before. After introductions, despite the large shift, there are actually more people who identify as male than the week prior” (Field Note: 10/7/2014). Transgender individuals find themselves marginalized in comparison with cisgender individuals within queer spaces. This mirrors American society’s transgender marginalization, as well as the transgender marginalization occurring within LGBTQIA+ spaces.

Transgender marginalization also occurs within queer spaces in a way as to mirror the dichotomous relationship between cisgender masculinity and cisgender femininity. Yellow, a self-identified transman, describes his experiences with binary transgender in queer spaces by noting, “while transmen are still marginalized, I feel that transmen are more accepted than transwomen.” Even within the marginalization faced by transgender individuals, there exist perks to encourage aligning oneself with the normative state of masculinity. Amongst the transgender and gender non-conforming demographics of the club, spanning all meetings, I was the only transfeminine individual present. Although I perform and identify my gender as being related more to mainstream articulations of femininity, I also identify in some small way as masculine and therefore non-binary. Among the general club members, I was also the only non-binary gender queer. Being the sole non-binary and transfeminine entity within the club proved isolating. It also led me to frequently wonder, “Where are the transwomen and non-binary queers hiding, and why?” My isolation provided me clues as to why, but the interview process reveals the fate of these individuals after their experiences with marginalization in queer spaces.

**Non-Binary Gender Erasure/Invalidation**

People who fail to conform to binary male-female gender are inadequately represented in queer spaces, often facing questions of the validity of their gender identity and performance from
other queers. One interviewee, who identifies as transmasculine and non-binary, helps to define the fate of trans* and non-binary individuals within the queer movement. Orange describes, “queer spaces are divided often, yeah. Cis male gay boys dominate the space and trans* identities need to make their own spaces to feel comfortable, many of them being non-binary, too.” The erasure of non-binary queers from these spaces leads to a migration to spaces of validation. This physical migration may also be seen in digital form. With social media, one may find global communities, making it possible to connect with larger numbers of non-binary queers. While highlighting the marginalization of non-binary individuals, this pattern also shows the fragmenting of queers into their individual identity categories. This fragmentation, stemming from cultural nationalist identity politics, points toward the bleak future of the queer movement. While marginalization and migration may be the reality of non-binary individuals, binary transgender individuals also deal with issues regarding non-binary gender performance.

Despite queerness indicating a fluidity of non-normative identities, the marginalization of non-binary gender within queer spaces leads to the diminishing of fluid genders. Many transgender individuals who may prefer to play with non-binary gender elements find this difficult to do comfortably in queer spaces, due to the invalidation of gender that accompanies such performances. Despite being a binary transman, Yellow says, “Once I fully transition I would feel more comfortable being able to add feminine clothing and performances to my fully male wardrobe.” In this instance, Yellow’s navigation of gender illuminates the invalidation of non-binary gender performance. Yellow cannot perform non-binary gender, due to the risks of invalidation, without first validating himself as queer in a non-refutable way. By using transition to bolster one’s queerness, one may comfortably begin to play with non-binary gender. For fully non-binary individuals, or even binary individuals not seeking a full gender transition, there may
be no means of finding validation in queer spaces without stifling non-binary behavior/performance. My personal spiritual beliefs, for example, dictate my refrain from altering the body I was born into. The state of my body as the sacred and inviolable seat of my mind and soul relegate me to a permanent state of non-binary gender and invalidation. Possessing an unaltered and male-sexed body leads often leads people to assume that my transfemininity is not genuine, should I decide to wear male-gendered clothing for any reason.

**Conclusion**

Queer spaces reflect LGBTQIA+ divisions and hierarchies based on gender, as well as replicate mainstream/normative binary gender. Non-binary gender exposes the social construction of gender, threatening binary cisgender and transgender views of gender identity. This threat, in turn, leads to the marginalization of non-binary gender queers. This protects the binary identities deemed normative in queer spaces by notions of queer cultural nationalism. If cultural nationalism continues to maintain the identity divisions antithetical to the fluidity of queer identities, how will it differ from the gay/lesbian-centered LGBTQIA+ movement? Queers must embrace the non-normative elements of queerness, rather than become self-absorbed in individual identity politics. Ultimately, a truly non-normative queer theory, expanded beyond the realms of sex, sexuality, and gender, must eliminate all nationalist borders and embrace all forms of non-normativity. Queerness, rather than a nation, should be a camp for non-normative refugees, just outside of the boundaries of normative society. Only the radical combination of non-normative races, sexes, sexualities, classes, genders, ability statuses, sizes, ages, etc. within a grander cooperative queer framework can confront the cultural nationalism at work in dividing and disempowering all facets of social justice.


Appendix
My first ethnographic study takes place at a meeting of queers on the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona’s campus. The meet is in a small classroom with slightly poorer-than-usual lighting, but otherwise standard accommodations: a whiteboard, projector screen and projector, and a computer system linking up with the projector and speakers in the room. The desks are typical, wooden, college-sized desktops with attached seats. I have seen classrooms on the campus with upgraded seats and projecting equipment. The majority of rooms, from my experiences on campus, possess the very basic furniture that the meeting room possesses. Even so, for a club meeting, I feel like a nicer room makes a difference in how club members perceive the club itself.

The room is neither decrepit nor lavish in comparison to others, yet the diminutive size and lighting leave a slight impression upon me. Are there really so few people who consider themselves Queer? All of those attending failed to fill the small room, so the size of the room was appropriate. Although the room may be appropriate, I would prefer a less-depressing room. There are no decorations, papers, or posters on the walls. The combination of the room’s small size and bareness make me feel that the club is unimportant in some way.

One interesting feature of this mundane classroom is its location on the university campus. The room is located in a building that also provides certain retail services to students. The building also serves as a connection from one walkway to the walkway leading to student housing. Due to these factors, the room itself is highly visible. The location of the room really threw me off. I knew where the building and room were before arriving at the meeting space, obviously. I had not considered, however, that the meeting takes place during U-Hour, when the campus is incredibly alive with moving student bodies. Before the meeting began, the room was locked, leaving me to wait around in a skirt in a highly visible location. I felt incredibly awkward waiting in such exposed fashion, so I took little walks to less-visible areas while waiting around for the room to be opened by the club officers. While I was not upset with any individuals for the room’s location, I still felt put-off by waiting around with the gaze of so many students upon me.
After the club’s president unlocks the room, I walk in along with one other general member and take a seat. In the middle of the room, I sat in a small desk, turning back to observe each person who enters for the club meeting. While I cannot really identify peoples’ sexes, I can definitively say that the members coming into the room mostly appeared to perform male gender.

Some of the members already know each other and begin to talk amongst themselves while the PowerPoint presentation for the first meeting is set up. One male performing person takes out a pair of needles and yarn and begins to knit, striking up a conversation with another male performer. Almost simultaneously, a separate pair of male-performing individuals begins to talk behind them. In both cases, all entities referred to each other with male pronouns, confirming their performances and identities as initially male. In both instances of conversation, I notice that all parties seem filled with both awkwardness and anxiety. Even though the people talking in class know each other (and apparently fairly-well), all individuals seem obviously uncomfortable socially interacting with peers in similar situations.

I realize that I have yet to interact with anybody, myself. I should also add that I am incredibly awkward and anxious around new people, and still fairly anxious around people I’m familiar with. Having recently identified my social anxiety with issues relating to my gender performance and identity, I cannot help but feel that the others in the room probably seem so uncomfortable because they’re marginalized based on their sex, gender, sexuality, etc. After having this thought, a male-performing person sits beside me and just starts talking to me without any warning. As an introvert, I tend to become startled and confused when people talk to me, interrupting my internal dialogue. I awkwardly introduce myself, noting no discussion of preferred pronouns in our introductions to each other. This lack of pronoun introduction in general conversations is not new to me, but felt inappropriate, given the nature of a queer space.

I then notice that this person appears to be talking to me flirtatiously. This makes me feel more awkward, as a person who is not really attracted to male entities, and therefore unused to being flirted with so overtly. I also feel that the assumption that I’m interested in men, given my “feminine” clothing choices today, shows this person’s assumption of homonormativity. Luckily, the meeting begins, saving me from a line of questioning obviously meant to gage some sort of romantic interest. I had to check my feelings of animosity toward this person, mostly due to their hyperactivity being too much for me to handle, but certainly heightened due to their assumptions about me and the sort of abrupt invasiveness of the encounter. Thinking about how being hit on felt invasive made me feel sad for my partner and friends who identify as women. In a way, the encounter was a sort of gender aggression, establishing male dominance. Would he have felt like I invaded his space if I’d interrupted his daydream to hit on him aggressively?

Most of the members arrive a little late, so the meeting begins ten minutes after the normal start time. After the room “fills,” there are fifteen members, including five members of the executive board. A sign-in sheet goes around with a space for our preferred pronouns. Most of the club has already signed the sheet by the time it gets to me. As I put down my pronouns as “they/them,” I notice that I am the only one and that most of the club uses “he/him.” We begin introductions, telling the club our names, majors, pronouns, and something interesting about
ourselves. During the introductions, I counted two people identifying themselves as “she/her,” three (myself included) using “they/them,” and the other ten used “he/him.” The other two people using gender neutral pronouns were e-board members, making me the only non-binary gender general club member. I anticipated results like this, but was unprepared to feel so isolated and upset by the demographics.

Why are there so many people who are male-identified and, furthermore, each one of them appears to have been born into their genders based on genitalia? As a queer space, I did not really expect, but still hoped for more people being gender queer, and not queer based on their sexuality. As a non-masculine person, I had also hoped for the club to not be dominated by people aligned with male identities. Cis-masculine people generally make me feel uncomfortable, as they often and unwittingly find ways to innocently bring attention to my feminine gender performances as flaws. With the exception of the guy who was hitting on me before the meeting started, none of the other males in the room made me feel uncomfortable. I still felt strangely vulnerable in a space dominated by males. The feeling seems irrational, but I think it’s a sort of embedded fear of masculinity meant to keep non-masculine or non-binary people from trusting and allying with males. It seems odd, but I relate it to the fear that’s instilled in white people towards men of color. It’s just such a basic and irrational emotion, making it hard to work past.

After the introductions, we went over club rules. The rules contained nothing unexpected. Basically, people are to respect other people, despite differences, and to be polite and not interrupt, etc. The current agenda for meeting topics and workshops throughout the year included gender and sexuality-based information, although the majority of topics dealt primarily with sexuality. I feel like there are plenty of resources for sexuality in other clubs and at the campus Pride Center. So, there being even a slight majority of sexuality-based topics seems superfluous to me. I end up being annoyed quite often, perhaps because I have myself attuned to homonormative behaviors too severely. In a queer club, I feel assaulted by numerous, unintentional, non-malicious, homonormative micro-aggressions. The decrepit quality of human existence in this society is something I always relate to micro-aggressions, so these feelings don’t surprise me.

Due to the nature of “first meetings,” there is not a lot of content after the rules, year agenda, and introductions. Before the meeting closes, however, there is a reminder. When leaving the room, people who are visibly “out” must respect people who are not “out” by not lingering near them to flag them as queer to their friends who do not know. I do not interpret this to be malicious. I feel like it’s meant to protect people from queer-related violences and aggressions. By nature, this rule ends up the burden of one group of people: gender queer individuals. Anybody who violates the “natural” gender binary openly cannot do so within “the closet.” The only people who remain within the closet are people who are queer based on sexuality and people who are gender queer, yet do not perform their gender identities. Sexuality, as a private matter, does not necessarily have to take a public form someday, as gender performance does. In a way, the rule is discretely homonormative, but simultaneously and understandably protective. The rule’s necessity and nature still piss me off, though.
As I approached this week’s meeting, I noticed a rainbow flag signifying the room to be a queer space. The flag feels contradictory to the space’s integrity in upholding confidentiality for those who are not public about being queer. Why would I need to avoid hanging around people who are not “out” when their friends are going to see them leaving the “rainbow flag room?” I think there’s a bit of immaturity involved in the “flag idea.” It all boils down to visibility, and whether or not it’s positive. Of course, Foucault says that it’s the panopticon at work (and I agree, especially when I can avoid discrimination by becoming invisible in “male” clothing), but there’s that sense of pride that many gays and lesbians have about being “out of the closet.” I’m an introvert. I like closets and various other secluded spaces where I can be alone and out of the gaze of others. My gender non-conforming behaviors made me further resent being looked at, though. I loathe being visible. I would even personally classify myself as being ophthalmophobic. By wearing the clothing that I like to wear, I am marking myself as a person not conforming to the masculine gender assigned to my penis when I was born. It’s not like the mark a vagina’s branded with by blue jeans and a t-shirt. This mark glows in the dark. It flashes. It draws attention. What makes me most comfortable as a non-gendered human being simultaneously transforms me into visual vortex. To be myself, I must be the most uncomfortable self I can imagine. To be myself, I must gather the intensity of bravery required to look back at the panopticon and spit in its eye(s). Rant cut short: they should take down the flag.

Moving inside of the classroom, there are again about fifteen people attending the meeting. About nine of them appear to be new faces who did not come the week before. After introductions, despite the large shift, there are actually more people who identify as male than the week prior.

This week’s meeting is less formal, and more about having little discussions to get acquainted with the club. People discussed their weekend and upcoming plans; there wasn’t anything particularly significant.

More significant, in my opinion, was listening to the guy who had hit on me last week hit on others in the class who appeared to have been born as men. Others seemed less offended by his advances, which I assumed to be related to their sexual orientation, or to their possible attraction and desire of his advances. Mostly, I feel annoyed that he’s using a safespace as a dating space. I doubt anybody uses the space as a secondary area to be subjected to male harassment.
No sign-in sheet was passed around at this meeting, perhaps because the e-board wasn’t really present, or perhaps because the turn-out was so small. There were only eight people in the room, including myself. This week’s meeting consisted of an asexuality presentation, given by an asexual member of the club. Asexuals tend to be a minority in both LGBT and queer spaces and, therefore, often appear marginalized. If there were substantial numbers of asexual people in our small club meeting, I would be very surprised. Perhaps not very many people attended due to disinterest in a topic that has nothing to do with them. If, as I have been finding, most people in the club identify as queer based on sexuality, rather than gender, then there would definitely be a majority of sexual people as well. I pride myself on struggling against ever being a single-issue individual, so I found the presentation on asexuality incredibly interesting and informative. I felt guilty for not knowing a lot of the information about asexuals already, as somebody who feels marginalized in LGBT and queer spaces myself. Clearly, given the turn-out and prior knowledge of this meeting's content, others in the club do not all feel as inclined to learn about their allies.

As interesting as the information was, the question & answer portion following proved more fascinating (fascinating like car accidents on the side of the road). It would be untruthful for me to pretend that I did not know the kinds of questions young college students might ask of asexuality, but I had hoped that some of them would not be asked. Of course, many of the questions had to do with sexuality. What I found of interest to my studies of gender were ideas involving gender preference as a clearly aesthetic preference without sex being considered. People who identify as males, for example, may be attracted to other males, but a penis has nothing to do with this attraction necessarily. As such, within the confines of asexual relationships, gender may be freed up to merely express aesthetic tastes and styles. This shifts gender from it's nigh-constant coupling with sexuality into the realm of individual, gender-neutral personality/appearance traits. While this does not mean that the gender binary breaks down by default, it does mean that gender can simply be one's expression of oneself.

After the brief Q&A session, the speaker brought up the need to discuss and choose topics we would like the club to hold workshops about. At first, the room was relatively quiet as we all appeared to search through our heads for ideas. Then, it happened: my speculations were validated, which is always sort of rewarding, even if the truth revealed is not so pleasant.

The male who was flirting with me and others during the first club meeting offered a suggestion about a dating tutorial to help people learn to successfully date. So, his religious attendance of club meetings and constant flirtations with others were with dating intentions, after all.

Although I had been annoyed with this male's advances before, I started to feel bad as he explained how hard it is to date. It became apparent that he had no real experience or means of getting advice geared toward queer dating. Furthermore, he's young and most people his age are not experts at dating. I felt like I was too hard on somebody who found the courage to awkwardly put themselves out there. I know that I was terrible at dating and very rarely found myself brave enough to ask people on dates, and those were undoubtedly easier as perceived heteronormative relations.
The only other real suggestion came from myself. I proposed a discussion of homonormativity in queer spaces. I had to explain homonormativity as the expectation that people who are queer all have same-sex attractions and that some people may be gender queer only. The only other person identifying as "they/them" at this particular meeting chimed in to say that they thought it was a great idea and it's something that they personally struggle with. This made me feel a lot of relief, as I would feel very awkward if the group put on a workshop of that nature just for me. By this point, I started to feel the homonormativity as a reality, rather than a perceived possibility in the meeting space. Having knowledge of at least one other person who is queer solely based on gender felt like enough for the space to not be a completely alienating location. Aside from the one individual, nobody else really appeared to understand homonormativity or why it could pose issues to queer spaces, which ultimately still points to the space being fairly homonormative... but not fully. I'll take what I can get.
Initially, I thought that there would be no meeting this week. The previous two weeks the meetings were cancelled, for one reason or another. This week, no mention of a meeting was included in the school's Pride Center e-mails. A meeting also was not announced by the club's facebook page, until the day of. I ended up not going today, but the topic was about alcohol abuse and the gay club scene. I feel incredibly disconnected from the topic, being a non-gay, older, non-binary trans* person with kids. Gay youth culture in queer spaces feels fairly alienating for people like me. Having children, in general, can be an isolating experience in queer spaces, too.
There have not been very many meetings lately. After the last meeting, which I missed, no further meetings were held for the academic quarter. Like with past meetings, after the schedule club time a sign-in sheet is passed around. Today is the first meeting of this quarter, and the club demographics have changed significantly. Cisgender gay men have become a minority, this week. Taking their place were cisgender women, transmen, and gender non-conforming folks. Due to this being the first meeting of the quarter, the club opens with a welcoming of new members and a review of the club rules. For this same reason, there wasn’t much club content today. Instead, all of the members went around and introduced themselves, including something interesting about themselves and what they did between quarters. When it is my turn, I mention not doing much, aside from hanging out with my kids and getting caught up on chores and schoolwork. During the previous quarter, I felt uncomfortable mentioning my children. Most of the people who would talk to me about them were less interested in my children and more interested in the novelty of a transfeminine college student having biological children. People who ask about my children today, however, never questioned the mechanics of the process. Instead, people simply seem interested in hearing about my kids and talking about their own younger relatives. At the end of the meeting, the member in charge of this week invited the club to be more present in the Pride Center. The reasoning is that the space is being dominated by cisgender males. Apparently, many people have felt uncomfortable because of this, further adding to the domination. So, we were essentially charged with occupying the center and taking it back for the whole community. Personally, I never spend time in the Pride Center. In my own experiences, I have also found it to be predominantly cisgender males. Typically, I get a lot of strange and/or mean looks when I go there. I feel sort of bad for being so critical of the club last quarter, given that the e-board cannot control who becomes their general membership. The entire mood and tone of the club this quarter has changed, however. The space feels more inclusive, thanks to the varied demographics and acknowledgment of privileges within the queer community.
This week, after filling out the sign-in sheet, I noticed that the demographics are more varied like the week before. The topic for this week’s discussion is transgender people of color and the differences they are making with their lives. My online activism generally revolves around being an ally to non-binary transgender people of color. As an ally, I give money, share important news about trans* people of color not being given the same attention as white trans* issues, and shut down white trolls. Due to this, I am aware of the rising number of transwomen of color being murdered. This week’s topic stems from this unfortunate truth, but seeks to look at the wonderful accomplishments of transgender people of color who are still with us. The club leaders seek to honor the living, not just the dead. We all break into small groups, are given a card with an individual and their accomplishments, and discuss them amongst each other. Then, we shared the information about our specific trans* hero of color. I find myself thoroughly impressed with the content of this week’s meeting, because it addresses one of the core social justice issues facing queer people. The intersectional marginalization of racialized transgender people makes them a highly vulnerable group, prone to suffering frequent violences. The demographics and conversations last quarter had me disillusioned about the social justice element of the club. After the discussion, the meeting leader reminds this week’s members to go to the Pride Center to keep it diverse and open to all populations. I know I still won’t end up going, mostly because there are more reasons that just being transfeminine that draw strange looks when I go there. People often see me with my children, and that feature of my life tends to stand out in a very young college population.
I don’t go to dances. In fact, I hate them. Having more friends and connections within the queer community this year, however, I felt compelled to go to the queer formal. The dance was located in one of the larger conference rooms on campus, and had its own designated gender-neutral bathroom. There was a free photo booth and a lot of food and drinks. A dance floor was set up in front of where people normally lecture from within the room, with tables and chairs framing in the dance floor. There were many different colored balloons – a rainbow of colors – scattered all over the dance floor and floating around the walls of the room. There were lots of colorful lights and a DJ, as well. It was a typical dance, in many respects. Outside of the room, staff checked for student IDs and handed out masks to wear. The masks are an interesting idea, and very queer in a way. Individual identities are less pronounced from behind the mask, giving rise to a simply queer identity at the dance. The bathroom held only stalls, and accommodated all gender identities. The lack of urinals made it obvious that the restroom was typically used for women, but I noticed that the stalls were a lot more numerous and smaller than those in men’s restroom layouts. Only during events like this does one even find gender neutral bathrooms on campus. I typically use the men’s restroom, even if I pee into a urinal while wearing a skirt. I do not possess, nor will I ever possess, passing privilege enough to be comfortable in a restroom designated for women.

Without a sign-in sheet or introductions, reading genders becomes a problematic task. The attendees are incredibly diverse in their queer and racialized identities. There are also a number of allies in attendance. Compared to the perceived cisgender population, numbers of gender non-conforming and transgender individuals appears low. Aside from less representation, there is not much else to be said about gender stratification at the dance. There were, however, instances I witnessed or experienced involving assumed sexuality. On the dance floor, there were some sexual dance antics that occurred. The dancer responsible assumed the other dancer (problematically) to be of a queer sexuality, which made the latter appear very uncomfortable and annoyed. I was also hit on by a cisgender male multiple times. Each time, he appeared to have forgotten, because he reintroduced himself and asked if I was a transwoman. For context, I was wearing a crop top, white denim jacket, and men’s jeans, so my gender performance may have been confusing for people unaccustomed to seeing non-binary folks in attendance. I did not have my partner with me, which made the dance a bit isolating and awkward. I also hate being looked at or dancing in public, so putting myself into a situation where I ended up doing a soul train line was mortifying.
Interview with “Red”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
I identify as gender fluid/genderqueer.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
I prefer she/her/they

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
Yes and no. There is often an assumption that, because I present mostly “feminine” I must identify as a woman. I usually deal with misidentification. And there are rare instances outside of my queer circle that my preferred gender pronouns are considered (whether directly asked about or considerately talked about).

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
I think it depends on the queer space and how that particular queer space defines “queer.” I connect with queerness on a very political level that includes intersections regarding my gender, sexuality, ability, class, and ethnicity. But not all queer-claiming spaces, who self-identify as queer, use it politically and do not refer to preferred gender pronouns. In queer communities, I think it’s safe to say that preferred gender pronouns traverse basic-knowledge consciousness.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
My gender performance behaviors vary. As a feminine-presenting person of color who embraces more (what happens to be) masculine behaviors/clothing, I am mostly conscious that I behave in more feminine ways. In more threatening spaces, I introvert myself and don’t care to be recognized because I find that I will be placed at risk of losing something that is valuable to me. In which case is, from experience, risking job loss. I think that gender performance behavior has varied and it’s becoming a life-long duty, as a political and self-respecting act, to conform less and less.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
Yes.

If so, why do such differences exist?
They exist to get by sometimes. I am not accepted as a queer woman of color. I am misidentified often and/or not properly recognized. In order to navigate, I feel like I need to behave in certain ways that almost make my identities invisible. This usually happens in my workspace. Otherwise, I do not like to perform.

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
Yes.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
I prefer queer people of color spaces because I find a closer connection culturally/ethnically and politically on deeper grassroots-radical terms.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
Yes.

Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?
I remain in queer spaces that make me feel empowered. I do feel marginalized in some queer spaces; usually non-QPOC (queer person of color) spaces.

Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?
Yes.

Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?
Yes and no. I think the queer movement is very much on a spectrum of opposing politics.

Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?
Yes and no. I think the actual “practice” of queer theory is relative.
Interview with “Orange”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
Currently femme, but also female transmale, woman, or non-binary.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
They/them.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
Queer friends do, yes. If other queers fail to use proper pronouns, it can be very upsetting. Others are not very great at respecting pronouns, but I don’t bother to enforce it as much with those types of people, and it’s more expected/less upsetting when non-queers mess up pronouns.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
Yes.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
Gender fluid performance.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
Yes.

If so, why do such differences exist?
I can’t always effectively perform both genders simultaneously.

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
In LGBT spaces, there’s no Intersectionality of identities. Queer spaces tend to be more understanding, caring about diverse identities.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
Queer spaces, because there often is no trans* representation in LGBT spaces.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
I actually feel less pressure to perform gender queerness in queer spaces.

Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?
More empowered, but it can fluctuate, depending on the day and who is around.

Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?
Queer spaces are often divided, yeah. Cis male gay boys dominate and trans* identities need to make their own spaces to feel comfortable, many of them being non-binary.

Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?
No, it is not.

Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?
In local queer spaces, I’m more represented than in the larger movement.
Interview with “Yellow”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
Transgender male, transman, or transboy.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
He/him, but sometimes they/them.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
It depends on who the person is. Strangers generally don’t even think about pronouns. I’m usually just awkward and hope an ally corrects them for me.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
Definitely.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
Whatever I feel like. Usually, I’m just a skater boy.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
I don’t think so, but other people are typically confused by my gender performance.

If so, why do such differences exist?
Once I fully transition, I would feel more comfortable being able to add feminine clothing and performances to my fully-male wardrobe.

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
No.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
Either space.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
I do whatever I want, regardless of the type of space I will be in.

Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?
It depends on the space. Sometimes in queer spaces, people assume gender because it’s awkward to ask.

Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?
Yeah. I feel like cis gay male culture speaks poorly about and otherizes non-gays. Drag culture treats trans* people like a joke.

Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?
I feel that transmen are more accepted than transwomen, but that transmen are still marginalized.

Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?
Yes. Transmen tend to be more visible, but transwomen usually avoid non-trans* spaces in favor of trans*-only spaces.
Interview with “Green”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
I identify as Femme.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
She or her or they or them.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
They do if they’re she or her. In spaces in which I express that I use either, they prefer she or her, I’m assuming because they or them complicates their idea of gender more than a femme-identified person using she or her.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
In terms of the they/them. But given that I’m queer and a ciswoman, the fact that I’m femme is seen as not queer. It’s seen as a contradiction.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
I largely perform in a way that is feminine, in terms of my representation. I like to wear dresses, I generally wear makeup. My behavior sometimes complicates that, because I’m an opinionated femme, and people expect me to be more submissive.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
Yes. I think that I identify as a ciswoman, knowing that not all parts of me completely match what society views as a ciswoman. And I sort of claim that politically, which is why I name myself as femme.

If so, why do such differences exist?

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
Only theoretically. I think that LGBT spaces tend to be very oriented toward white gay men. Queer spaces try to unpack that, but only the most radical queer spaces ever achieve anything that’s not binary or focused on the sex/sexual orientation more.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
I still prefer Queer spaces, because at least there’s an attempt toward an ideal, whereas LGBT spaces are really just LG spaces.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
Sometimes it feels like I’m able to be more of my ideal self in queer spaces, because it’s okay to be radical and feminine at the same time.

**Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?**
Because I’m a ciswoman, I’m feminine, for people who don’t get to know me or people I don’t have conversations with, I’m read as a normative ciswoman, and I think that to be a queer ciswoman in queer spaces is to be masculine, or at least that you should perform queerness in a certain way, like getting tattoos or piercings, and I don’t really have those things.

**Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?**
I think they’re fragmented in lots of ways. That’s certainly one of them. There’s definitely a favoring of all masculine people, whether they’re gay, lesbian, bi, or trans, and there’s sort of a distaste for feminine people as normative and submissive.

**Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?**
No. I participate in a lot of femme spaces, that are consciously for femmes of all types. In terms of general queer spaces, I don’t feel represented.

**Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?**
Femmes are definitely poorly represented in physical queer spaces I’ve been to.
Interview with “Blue”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
I am a cisgender woman.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
She or her, generally.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
They do, because they don’t go against gender norms.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
For mine, certainly. Not necessarily for everybody.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
Feminine. My representation is less feminine than I would like to be, mostly because of money.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
I can’t afford to wear the type of clothing that I want or buy the products that I want, nor do I have the time, as somebody who works, goes to school, and has familial responsibilities.

If so, why do such differences exist?

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
I think that there should be a distinction, but that they both mostly operate around gay or lesbian, according to media images and issues, like same sex marriage.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
I prefer queer spaces, just because they are still friendlier toward lots of different identities.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
I think that queer spaces allow for femininity, but it has to be really “in your face,” and that involves the clothes, hairstyles, and makeup that I don’t have the time and money for, so I’m seen as a lazy sort of feminine, that’s read as really heterosexual. So, if I had the time and money, I’d probably perform more in that way.

Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?
Within queer spaces, I feel marginalized by being feminine, unless you perform in the most extremely feminine way. It’s so feminine it’s fake.

**Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?**
I think it’s about gender performance, not gender identity. People who identify as women by perform as masculine still gain some privilege in queer spaces.

**Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?**
I think that the movement is still privileging masculinity above femininity, in general.

**Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?**
In the spaces themselves, the lack of feminine representation is even less.
Interview with “Indigo”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
I identify as a non-binary transwoman.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
I go by she/her or they/them.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
The majority of people don’t respect my pronouns. They usually call me “dude” or “man,” rather than he/him. I don’t think it upsets me as much as it would most people, though.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
Yeah. Typically, they are. I’ve not had any issues with people calling me he/him/dude in queer spaces. It tends to be that most people will use she/her rather than they/them.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
I perform my gender as a transwoman, as far as my clothing, hair, makeup, etc., but I don’t want to change my body through hormones or surgery. I don’t feel fully accepted as a transwoman, because I don’t want to change my sex, so I identify as non-binary because I don’t fit either gender.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
Not really. I mean, I identify as a transwoman and dress like a woman, but I wouldn’t want to change my body to match my gender, because they’re completely separate things for me.

If so, why do such differences exist?

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
I think that LGBTQ spaces are dominated by lesbian and gay people, particularly white gay men. People who don’t fit into those two identities seem to fit better in queer spaces.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
I prefer queer spaces. Sometimes, there are issues, depending on who is running it.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
No. I feel like I can perform my gender more truly in queer spaces. Even though I identify as a transwoman, there are circumstances in mainstream society for performing my gender.
So, for my safety, and the safety of those around me, sometimes I wear men’s clothing and attempt to blend in as a long-haired “guy.”

**Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?**
The non-binary elements and my body make me feel unaccepted as a transwoman. Before people realize that I’m non-binary, they typically treat me as any other transwoman. It’s still sort of an inferior position, because masculinity is favored over femininity.

**Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?**
I believe that they are. Misogyny exists everywhere in a patriarchal society. Masculinity is the desired gender, so as a transwoman, you don’t necessarily have as many privileges as a transman.

**Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?**
In theory, yes. Only the fact that I identify as non-binary due to my body, do I ever get pushback for being a transwoman.

**Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?**
Not so much. A lot of queer spaces are still very much filled with cisgender people, so transgender people are a small portion. Smaller still are transwomen. I feel like it’s less safe to be a transwoman, so we tend to join private groups.
Interview with “Violet”

Questions:
How would you describe your gender identity?
I identify as agender.

What gender pronouns do you prefer for yourself?
I prefer they/them.

Do others respect your pronouns, and how do instances of pronoun dismissal affect you?
Generally, others don’t respect my pronouns. It doesn’t really matter how I perform my gender. People tend to misgender me as male. You know, it doesn’t feel great. I resent it a lot.

Are queer spaces better for the respect of preferred gender pronouns?
Yeah, usually. I don’t have a lot of issues with people not using they/them. I think my gender performance gives me away as trans in some way, so queers usually ask for my pronouns.

How would you describe your gender performance behaviors?
Probably as transfeminine, just because I prefer women's clothing. I really love wearing pants and t-shirts, too, though. I can go back and forth a lot, wearing whatever I want, regardless of how the clothing is gendered by others.

Are there meaningful differences between your gender identity and its public performance?
Well, no. I don’t really side with any gender or even third gender. I consider gender just a societal set of rules assigned to the sexes, but I just do what I want.

If so, why do such differences exist?

Do you see any important distinctions between LGBTQ spaces and Queer spaces?
LGBTQ spaces are not very friendly toward people like me. I tend to get a lot of weird looks when I go to LGBTQ spaces. Like, dirty looks and scowls, even. It’s just as bad as heterosexist spaces.

If so, which type space do you prefer (if you have a preference) and why?
I prefer queer spaces, because people are more open to different gender performances and more fluidity.

Do you feel the need to perform your gender differently, or to a different extent, within queer spaces as opposed to heterosexist spaces?
I do feel more pressured to perform femininely, because it gives me a sort of queer validity. I mean, as a person born with a male sex, I just, if I’m wearing men’s clothing, people won’t take me seriously as queer. So, I do feel pressured to behave more femininely to let people know I’m queer, as stupid as that sounds aloud.

**Do you feel marginalized or empowered by your gender identity within queer spaces?**

I don’t feel great about my lack of gender identity within the sort of gender hierarchy in queer spaces. I often feel like people are invalidating everything about me, and imposing that I don’t belong. I don’t feel as threatened or judged as in other spaces, though.

**Do you feel that queer spaces are fragmented/divided based upon gender identity?**

Yeah. I think that masculinity trumps femininity in queer spaces, still. And if you’re not male, female, or any gender, that you’re not really represented so much, unless you have other queer elements to offer, like being sexually queer.

**Is your gender identity adequately represented within the broader Queer Movement?**

And if you’re not male, female, or any gender, that you’re not really represented so much, unless you have other queer elements to offer, like being sexually queer.

**Is this level of representation reflected in queer spaces, where the actual practice of Queer Theory takes place?**

Yeah. Agender people are forgotten theoretically and in practice, as far as my experiences go.