

LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults Perceptions of Discrimination and Exclusion within the LGBTQ+
Community

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Abstract

Research on LGBTQ+ emerging adult populations has primarily focused on discrimination that is experienced within the heterodominant culture. Due to systems of oppression and the forces of power and privilege, some sexual and gender minorities experience isolation and discrimination not only within the heterodominant culture, but within the LGBTQ+ community as well. Fourteen lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) young adults (20-25 years) with a diverse array of intersecting identities (e.g., gender, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural) participated in semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups. Participants reported on experiences of biphobia, acephobia, transphobia, gatekeeping the community, LGBTQ+ people of colour's experiences of racism within the community, other forms of oppression, and offered advice on areas of growth for the LGBTQ+ community. Findings provide insight into LGBTQ+ emerging adults experiences of discrimination and future research implications.

Keywords: LGBTQ; discrimination; emerging adulthood; exclusion; community; intersectionality

LGBTQ+ Emerging Adults Perceptions of Discrimination and Exclusion within the LGBTQ+ Community

Emerging adulthood has been identified as a key developmental stage for constructing and integrating various aspects of identity into a unified sense of self (Arnett, 2000). During emerging adulthood (ages 18-25), new social roles within one's community are explored and young people are challenged to integrate aspects of the self into a coherent identity configuration (Arnett, 2000). Identity development and integration are often challenging, especially for those who belong to marginalised groups such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+¹) community. LGBTQ+ emerging adults' identity development may be strained due to experiences of victimization, social isolation, and harassment from their family, peers, and the greater systems of oppression within the heterodominant culture (Meyer, 2003). During emerging adulthood, sexual and gender identity development (i.e., disclosures, identity labeling, identity affirmation) occurs largely within social interactions, with the LGBTQ+ community being a potential source of support to aid in identity exploration and seeking support within larger non-affirming contexts (i.e., heterodominant culture; Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Frost & Meyer, 2012; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

LGBTQ+ people are at increased risk for negative mental health outcomes due to stigma (i.e., individual, interpersonal, structural) and discrimination from the heterodominant culture (Meyer, 2003). However, research has not fully explored how discrimination and exclusion occur within the LGBTQ+ community itself. Based on a review of the growing literature on

1. The present study uses the acronym "LGBTQ+" (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning or other personal identity label) to encapsulate a range of sexual and gender identities (Parent, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2013). The acronym demonstrates inclusivity of gender identity (i.e., transgender), is not as cumbersome, and acknowledges various sexual identities through the "plus" symbol at the end, thereby inviting all sexual and gender identities into the conversation.

LGBTQ+ populations, discrimination and microaggressions (Liao et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2011), and connection to community (McConnell, Janulis, Phillips II, Truong, & Birkett, 2018; Meyer, 2010), discrimination and experiences of oppression were emphasized as needing further exploration. The present study seeks to explore the experiences of discrimination LGBTQ+ emerging adults face within the LGBTQ+ community.

Experiences of the LGBTQ+ Community

The literature on the positive aspects of the LGBTQ+ community demonstrates that sexual and gender minorities emphasize a sense of connection to the greater LGBTQ+ community (Fraser, 2008; Riggle, Whiteman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). Feeling a sense of connection to community is linked to better mental health outcomes and lower minority stress (DiFulvio, 2011; Puckett, Levitt, Horne, & Hayes-Skelton, 2015; Salfras, Rendina, & Parsons, 2018). However, an emerging theme in the literature suggests that some sexual and gender minorities actively avoid engaging with the LGBTQ+ community (Adam et al., 2014; Goltz, 2014), expressing that by avoiding the LGBTQ+ community they were also avoiding experiences of harassment or alienation from other members of the community (Fraser, 2008; O'Byrne et al., 2014). LGBTQ+ individuals have also reported concern about the potential for exclusion and alienation for those who do not meet the undefined ideals of the community (Duncan, 2010; Fraser, 2008; Huxley, Clarke, & Halliwell, 2014; O'Byrne et al., 2014). Some emerging adults personally identify as LGBTQ+ but do not wish to socially identify with the LGBTQ+ community due to the community being 'more constricting than liberating' (p. 1519, Goltz, 2014). Goltz (2014) found that LGBTQ+ emerging adults from the millennial generation did not find the LGBTQ+ community to be an important element in their sexual or gender identity. Exploring the experiences of younger cohorts of LGBTQ+ people may help identify

specific forms of discrimination that inform future research and interventions for LGBTQ+ youth and their communities.

Discrimination and Oppression within the LGBTQ+ Community

Systems of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism) are unique for those with different marginalised identities and various intersecting identities (i.e., LGBTQ+ people of colour). Research has primarily focused on these systems of oppression and discrimination within the dominant culture. For example, sexual minorities experience heterosexism, people of colour face systems of racism, women face experiences of sexism, and those who identify as transgender and genderqueer encounter cisgenderism. However, findings indicate that systems of oppression enter and permeate within the LGBTQ+ community as well (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Bowleg, 2013; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012).

The LGBTQ+ community is viewed as a multicultural community with diverse sexual identities, ethnicities, genders, and social backgrounds. However, due to the forces of power and privilege, the LGBTQ+ community is still centered around young, White, upper-middle-class, cisgender gay men (Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Goltz, 2014; Nadal, 2013). Individuals who do not fall in to this narrow category are often left feeling excluded and marginalised. Specifically, those who identify as transgender, gender queer, or gender non-conforming are often excluded or not a primary focus in research of the LGBTQ+ community (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Bisexual, pansexual, or sexually fluid individuals have also expressed a lack of connectedness or belonging with the LGBTQ+ community due to feelings of marginalization from both the LGBTQ+ community and the heterodominant culture (Bradford, 2004). Specifically, Flanders, Dobinson, and Logie (2015) found that many bisexual emerging adults did not feel they could be

their full selves due to the lack of affirming resources within the LGBTQ+ and heterodominant cultures. Emerging adults who identify with non-binary sexual and gender identities experience invisibility and nonrepresentation of their sexual and gender identities (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Galupo, Davis, Grynkieqicz, & Mitchell, 2014; Ghabrial & Ross, 2018). LGBTQ+ people of colour often experience discrimination and oppression within different social contexts; experiencing racism within the LGBTQ+ community and reporting feelings of alienation within their racial or ethnic community (Balsam et al., 2011; Ghabrial, 2019; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; Han, 2007). An intersectional approach that explores multiple aspects of identities and complex experiences of discrimination is warranted in order to understand unique forms of privilege and oppression within the context of the LGBTQ+ community.

Current Study

Discrimination may foster feelings of exclusion for sexual and gender minorities, thereby leaving individuals wondering *who* has a place within the community. The current study contributes to a growing body of research concerning our understanding of in-group discrimination and exclusion, specifically among LGBTQ+ emerging adults expressing their views of oppression within the LGBTQ+ community. Young adults frequently lack a voice in the empirical literature and lack representation in within-group discrimination research (Delgado, 2006; Flanders et al., 2015). It is important for research to address this gap as LGBTQ+ emerging adults may face barriers in accessing various forms of social support (i.e., familial, heterosexual peers, and LGBTQ+ community members). The current study seeks to: (a) explore sexual and gender minority emerging adults' experiences of discrimination and exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community, and (b) understand the different intersecting forms of oppression that contribute to the experiences of exclusion.

Methods

Study Design and Role of the Researcher

Data collection and analyses for this study were a part of a larger project concerning sexual and gender minorities experiences within the LGBTQ+ culture (Parmenter, Galliher, & Maughan, in press). The present study utilised a phenomenological framework and qualitative design in order to best understand sexual and gender minorities' experiences of discrimination and exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community (Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007; Davidsen, 2013). The study is situated within the theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Moradi, 2017; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017), which critically analyses power and privilege and its influence on an individual's social world as well as how identities intersect and influence stressors. This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the authors' university.

The first author— identifying as a White, highly educated/first-generation college student, able-bodied, agnostic, genderqueer-masculine presenting gay man — was cognizant of how privilege and oppression have intersected and impacted his life's trajectory and construct his worldview. The second author is a White, able-bodied, highly educated, cisgender woman who does not claim a particular sexual identity label, but accrues privilege associated with heterosexual marriage. The third author identifies as a White, highly educated, cisgender gay man who was affiliated with a conservative religious organization. As gay men, the first and third author may maintain insider status with the participant group, while also remaining an outsider with respect to ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and other identities. Acknowledging the insider status while also being aware of the unique differences among participants was highly valued through the research process in order to analyse how diverse experiences shape

development. We did strive to maintain awareness of how power and privilege, as well as how our interpretations of the findings may be connected to our personal views and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. We engaged in an ongoing process of acknowledging and exploring our subjective experiences while attempting to manage biases during data analysis (Bourke, 2014; Morrow, 2005). We discussed our identities and how our subjective experiences may have influenced our interpretation of the findings (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2017).

Participant Recruitment and Demographic Information

Participants were recruited nationally through LGBTQ+ organizations, LGBTQ+ listservs, and university diversity centers. The recruitment text specified that participants must be English speaking, self-identify as LGBTQ+, and be 18-25 years of age in order to be eligible for the study. Email invitations directed participants to an appointment management website via a link to sign-up for an individual interview appointment. Researchers screened for sexual orientation, gender identity, and age through questions included on the scheduling web page. Three potential participants were excluded because they did not meet age inclusion criteria and an additional two people were turned away after saturation had been achieved. Participants who met the study inclusion criteria and wished to participate completed a Qualtrics survey with an informed consent form and demographic information. Within the demographic survey, participants were asked to submit their email addresses in order to receive a \$20 Amazon Gift certificate after completion of the interview and another \$20 after completing the focus group. Fourteen participants between the ages of 20-25 ($M= 23.07$, $SD= 1.68$) were recruited from across the United States. Table 1 provides information regarding the participants' chosen pseudonym, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, pronouns, ethnic identity, and the extent of

study participation. Table 2 provides information regarding education, relationship status, and community description.

Data Collection

Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted using the videoconferencing platform Zoom. Videoconferencing provides opportunities to link people who are scattered across broad geographical regions, which aids researchers in overcoming issues of location while facilitating a diverse participant sample (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017).

Participants chose pseudonyms for themselves to maximise confidentiality. Transcription of audio recordings was ongoing throughout data collection in order to clarify emerging themes, and refine interview questions. The first author made conceptual notes regarding themes that emerged from each interview and focus group, engaged in personal analysis regarding biases due to various intersections of identity (Hopkins et al., 2017).

Individual interviews. Individual interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. All fourteen participants participated in the individual interviews conducted by the first author. Interviews were semi-structured and utilised an interview guide to provide prompts that would guide discussion while allowing the researcher to ask additional follow-up questions. In so doing, the interviewer sought to ensure accuracy and authenticity, that is, that the data collected truly reflected the views and experiences of the participants. Individual interviews were video recorded and later transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the information provided. After transcripts were completed and reviewed for errors, transcripts were emailed to participants for member checking.

Online focus group interviews. All fourteen participants from the individual interviews were invited to participate in one of two online focus groups. Online focus groups utilizing a

semi-structured interview guide were conducted to gather further information on themes emerging from the individual interviews. Seven participants signed up to participate in the online focus groups, however two participants dropped out of the focus groups resulting in one focus group containing three participants and a second group consisting of two participants. Online focus groups allow for rich discussion of topics on which participants may hold differing views (Zwaanswijk & van Dulmen, 2014). Focus groups improve the credibility and validity of the information gathered from the individual interviews while also furthering the existing qualitative data. Online focus groups were video recorded and lasted approximately 1.5 to 2 hours in length.

Transcript review. Transcript review allowed for participants to closely review their interview transcripts in order to validate, expand, and clarify information provided during their interview (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). For the present study, transcript review consisted of emailing participants a copy of their interview and focus group transcripts and offering them the opportunity to make comments, add, or subtract information from the interview transcript. Allowing participants to validate, expand, or clarify the information they provided during the interviews and focus groups ultimately improved the accuracy and credibility of the data. All fourteen interviews were provided to participants and nine of fourteen transcripts were returned after member checking. One of five participants completed member checking for the focus group transcript. The authors did not have to reconcile inconsistencies from the transcript review as most participants made minor edits or simply validated the accuracy of the information from their transcript review. The two participants who added information to their transcripts expanded upon ideas already mentioned from their individual interviews, thereby building consistency rather than introducing discrepancy.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis began with conceptual and reflexive notes, analytic files, rudimentary coding schemes, and finalizing data using an iterative coding process. Video recordings were transcribed as online interviews and focus groups were completed. The first author verified the accuracy of the transcripts by carefully reading through the content and using the video recording to edit any errors before beginning final data analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify repeated patterns of meaning across interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis utilises an inductive reasoning approach that allows analysis to build on patterns that appear within the data to form larger thematic topics (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014). Thematic analysis meets the goals of this project by helping us consolidate the experiences of our participants in an effort to explore patterns of meaning and experience. The coding process involved the first and second authors reading and analyzing all transcriptions. Initial themes were reviewed and analysed further until presenting themes were refined. To minimise discrepancies in coding and themes, a final set of themes was discussed among the authors until consensus was reached.

Methodological Integrity

Triangulation. Qualitative methodology encourages the concept of triangulation (i.e., multiple methods used to study interconnected phenomena from a variety of perspectives; Carter, Bryan-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Triangulation allows for verification of the information gathered from the qualitative methodology, thereby strengthening the credibility of the studies' findings (Carter et al., 2014). The current study achieved triangulation of the data through individual interviews, focus groups, transcript reviews, as well as through consulting the literature and research team on emerging themes. To strengthen the accuracy and richness of the

data, transcript reviews and focus groups were used to verify and expand upon content identified during the individual interviews.

Assessment of saturation. Interviews were conducted until the authors obtained a point of saturation in the data, meaning that the topics discussed had become redundant and no new information was being gained by continuing interviews (Saunders et al., 2017). Assessment of saturation was achieved through transcribing interviews and conceptual notes made during data collection, allowing the interviewer to identify emerging themes. The first author stopped data collection and consulted with the second and third author to ensure no gaps in the data before moving onto final data analysis (Saunders et al., 2017).

Findings

Participants shared the multiple forms of discrimination and oppression they experienced or witnessed within the LGBTQ+ community. As participants discussed their perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community and their experiences of discrimination and exclusion, several broad themes and subthemes were identified: 1) Gatekeeping, which manifested in the forms of biphobia, acephobia, and transphobia or cisgenderism, 2) LGBTQ+ People of Colour, 3) Gender Roles, 4) LGBTQ+ Community being Centered around White, Gay, Cisgender Men, and 5) Areas of Growth.

Gatekeeping

Many participants expressed their frustrations with experiencing discrimination inside the LGBTQ+ community itself. Amadi shared, 'There are people who ostracise and discriminate people within the same community.' Participants described feelings of exclusion and that the LGBTQ+ community had members that sought to be 'gatekeepers' to decide who was in the community and who was not. Kendra shared, 'It's like this constant back and forth of who gets

to be in the club.’ Several participants expressed their frustrations regarding exclusion within the community.

even though we're all a part of a community and all share some sort of common identity... that discrimination is still there. And there's some aspects within people in the community and attitudes within the community that they are either supposed to be gate-keeping or that like some people shouldn't belong. (Oliver I)

it can be troubling when a community that's supposed to be based on like, pride and being open about who you are, whoever you are, to have still that kind of like... gatekeeping... you have to still fit this kind of mold mentality... it does make it difficult for people who don't fit the typical like gay or queer mold to fit in and feel accepted. (Oliver II)

Feeling excluded from the LGBTQ+ community or feeling ‘not LGBTQ+ enough’ appears to be a concern for sexual and gender minority emerging adults. Kendra expressed frustrations of witnessing exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community.

I almost consider people like that to be not part of the community, because they're not living up to the ideals that I'm expecting of them. So you may identify with our community, but you're not holding up our core tenets. Are you really in our community if you can't be accepting? (Kendra)

Kendra's frustration with the LGBTQ+ community is primarily due to the disconnect between the act of excluding others from the community, and the notion that the LGBTQ+ community values inclusion and acceptance. Of note, the participants who articulated this theme of gatekeeping identified as non-monosexual or have non-binary identities. Intersectional systems of oppression, such as monosexism (i.e., structural invalidation of bisexuality and other non-monosexual identities; Ross et al., 2010) and genderism (i.e., erasure of non-binary identities due to the belief that gender is binary; Sampson, 2014) appear to interfere with bisexual, pansexual, and non-binary individuals feeling included in the community.

Biphobia

Many participants, especially those who identified as bisexual, shared experiences of biphobia and binegativity. Some bisexually identified participants described experiences of

exclusion and alienation from the rest of the community. Squid shared, ‘I realised that bisexual people in particular have to intentionally form a community. It doesn’t just happen.’ Participants attributed this partially to binegative views and having their bisexual identity invalidated by both the heterodominant culture and fellow sexual and gender minorities. Summer shared, ‘we receive prejudice from both sides. Because many people within the LGBTQ community kind of believe that, “Well, it's a phase,” or, “You can't pick a side,”’. Squid went on to elaborate about experiencing invalidating remarks about bisexuality.

I feel like the biggest area that I've... faced discrimination in is the pansexual versus bisexual debate, and whether or not bisexuality is still a valid identity. Um, a lot of people will say that pansexuality is, I don't know, I guess Bisexuality 2.0, is how somebody described it... What it does it...it erases bisexuality in the present and pansexuality in the past. It...it claims that pansexuality or the experience of pansexuality has no history, is essentially what that's saying. (Squid)

Summer and Squid’s experiences of monosexism, demonstrated through biphobia and bi-invisibility/bi-erasure, is primarily centered around invalidation of their sexual identity. Kendra expressed her frustration about invalidation of her bisexual identity, specifically due to her relationship with a man.

some people say if you’re bisexual or you’re transgender and you’re in a heterosexual relationship you shouldn’t be a part of the core community. There’s a lot of bickering about who’s in the club, which I...I find is a little, um, distasteful. It puts a bad taste in my mouth. (Kendra)

Of note, three participants (Kendra, Summer, and Pega) were currently in relationships with other-gender partners and identified as bisexual, pansexual, and queer cisgender women stated they felt marginalised by both the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual culture. It appears monosexism is especially prevalent for those who hold non-monosexual identities while in a relationship with other-gender partners.

Acephobia

Participants shared witnessing or hearing negative attitudes towards asexuality (i.e., acephobia). Seattle stated that within the LGBTQ+ community, there is, ‘some tensions there with... with asexuality.’ Both Oliver I, who stated they identified as asexual during earlier stages of their sexual identity development, and Oliver II described the negative attitudes towards asexuality found within the community.

Asexuality is a big... it's been a big topic of debate... people thinking Asexual people don't belong in the community... because um, being Asexual, you still can be cisgender and hetero-romantic or just like "cis het" in some way. And in that sense, you would technically be the oppressor... and in that sense... you shouldn't belong or take community resources away from people who are actually queer. (Oliver I)

I see a lot of acephobia within the LGBT community because it isn't even like the typical gay identity, it's seen as something that goes against even norms that are set by the LGBT community (Oliver II)

While there has been increased visibility of asexuality within the LGBTQ+ community, asexuality still appears to be a target of ostracization and discrimination (Chasin, 2015; Galupo et al., 2014). Although Oliver I stated they identified as asexual earlier in their sexual identity development, no participants currently identified as asexual within the study. The result of this is that non-asexual people within the study were responsible for describing acephobia within the LGBTQ+ community, based on observations rather than personal experiences.

Transphobia or Cisgenderism

Participants discussed the prevalence of transphobia, cisgenderism (i.e., prejudice and systemic oppression towards those who do not identify as cisgender; Ansara & Hegarty, 2012), and exclusion of transgender and gender minorities within the LGBTQ+ community. Kendra shared that ‘transgender people, I feel like, possibly have it the worst in the community.’ Kendra shared experiences of witnessing transphobia within the LGBTQ+ community, pertaining to a person she follows on social media.

I've been following this person for a very long time, so it's probably like seven...seven years later, now the person's identity has evolved into a transgender female to male, and that he is in a relationship with a man. So, he posts a lot of his experiences within the community and kind of exclusionary things that he faces. So there's this idea that if you are a trans man, you're not a "true man" whatever that means. (Kendra)

Some participants also described how transgender and gender nonconforming individuals experience a 'lot of rejection and just not feeling they have a space within those communities' (Oscar). Alex shared, 'I guess the only piece that like sometimes feels weird is that I — or that doesn't fit quite as well [within the LGBTQ+ community] — is the gender piece.' Others felt their identities did not have space within the community due to in-group dialogue about who is included in claiming specific identity labels. Jenny discussed her experience as a transgender woman and the dissonance she felt when identifying herself as lesbian. Jenny shared, 'there's a lot of inter... uh... *intra* community dialogue among, uh, queer women about who *can* claim the lesbian identity and so I felt like I was potentially excluded from that.'

Gender minority participants felt their identities did not have space within the community due to systems within the community that still supported binary gender identities. Oliver II stated, 'I identify as agender and the sexual identity system depends on a binary gender. So, I don't super fit in that way, just because I am outside some of the more commonly known identities.' Oliver II's comment on 'more commonly known identities' demonstrates systems of oppression that dictate what sexual and gender identities are seen as 'normal' and may have more value within the community. Oliver II's feelings of exclusion partially stem from binary systems of gender on which sexual identity labels often depend. Both systems of cisgenderism, monosexism, and heterosexism rely on a binary system of gender, as the labels orient around identification as or attraction to either men or women.

LGBTQ+ People of Colour

Participants who identified as LGBTQ+ people of colour shared experiences of discrimination that evoked strong feelings of disappointment in the community. Amadi shared, ‘a lot of Black people will face a lot more stigma than their White counterparts.’ Moana shared, ‘a lot of white gays tend to culturally appropriate, fetishise uh... skin colour.’ Oscar shared how LGBTQ+ people of colour’s experiences of being in the community can often ‘be difficult due to racial prejudice or... just a lot of rejection and just not feeling they have a space within those communities.’ Moana continued to express her frustration regarding experiences of racial prejudice within the LGBTQ+ community.

when I hear shit about other people of colour in the LGBT community, I do take that personally, um, because I definitely think that if you have a vendetta against black people or if you have a vendetta against, ... latin...Latinx people or even just people of colour, when I hear that shit, like I take that personal. Because that means you also probably have a vendetta against Polynesian people or Pacific Islanders, I also think it probably means you have a vendetta against, you know, people that I want to have solidarity with. (Moana)

Amadi witnessed and experienced other systems of racism within the LGBTQ+ community.

I still find it hard to make reference to black gay men who are like represented like... When I google or go on instagram and I see gay weddings, I will have to scroll and scroll as I find two black men who are like, you know, like getting married. (Amadi)

Amadi described the lack of LGBTQ+ people of colour being represented within the LGBTQ+ community and in media. Structural racism is a system where policies, institutions, and representation of a given culture interact and perpetuate inequity among racial or ethnic minority groups (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, Abdurrahim, 2012). Amadi’s experience of not seeing Black sexual and gender minority men in the media is a form of structural racism by not seeing representation of his racial group within the larger LGBTQ+ community.

Gender Roles

Some participants expressed there were discriminatory remarks focused around body image and gender roles. Amadi shared his experiences on dating apps, saying, ‘like if people demand, “*Masc only*”... and I’m like, “What the fuck does that mean?” (*Laughs*). Like, what are you gonna do with that anyways?’ Seattle shared, ‘I see like, more effeminate men feeling very judged for being effeminate and seeing more masculine gay men as the norm.’ Amadi shared these experiences of discrimination among sexual minority men, primarily within the dating scene.

some people say things like, “Oh, no black, no fems, no fat”... So that’s very discriminatory. If, if I was a very fat person, or if I was, um, a very effeminate person, I would feel like there is something wrong with me, right? The person who is discriminated because they are effeminate, shouldn’t have to come to a gay space and... be afraid to be effeminate. (Amadi)

Sexual minority men, at times, experience internalised heterosexism and homophobia centered around violation of masculine gender roles (Clark & Smith, 2015; Parmenter, Blume, Crowell, & Galliher, 2019; Taywaditep, 2002). Specifically, these heterosexist notions promote conformity to masculine gender role ideologies and devalue and stigmatise those who are feminine presenting and do not conform to masculine ideals. Within Amadi’s context, systems of heterosexism that promote masculine ideologies also intersect with systems of racism, as dominant ideologies regarding masculine gender roles are centered around White, upper-middle class men (Richmond, Levant, & Ladhani, 2012). Black masculinity has often been associated with theologically-driven heterosexism and patriarchy within Black and African communities (Ward, 2006).

LGBTQ+ Community Being Centered Around White, Cisgender, Gay Men

Participants described how ideals within the heterodominant society have seeped into the LGBTQ+ community. Primarily, participants shared how the community privileged and

idealised White, cisgender, men. Moana stated, 'I need a distinction between White LGBT community and racialised... er... ethnic LGBT. Because to me, I don't know what White LGBT culture is.' Participants, such as Oscar, described how the culture was still centered around White people and lacked representation or acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ people of colour.

The LGBTQ [community] may seem as just a white entity in some instances, ummm, and that a lot of people who do identify as Latino or Latinx and LGBTQ might not feel like those spaces are spaces for people who are also of, people of colour who are queer. (Oscar)

Participants acknowledged that the LGBTQ+ community also promoted aspects of patriarchy by centering on cisgender men. Oscar shared, 'I mean a lot of times gay identity itself is privileged within the LGBTQ community.' Amadi described, 'LGBTQ culture is very... male friendly... when people say "gay people", they are most likely talking about gay men.' Amadi expressed how the community was primarily male-centric, which demonstrated the invisibility and omission of other sexual and gender minority groups within the broader community. LGBTQ+ people of colour as well as sexual and gender minority women may not feel a strong sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community compared to White sexual minority men due to the community's focus on White cisgender gay men.

Areas for Growth

Lastly, participants expressed that there is still room for growth within the LGBTQ+ community. Alex agreed and stated, 'I think there's room for flexibility in our culture.' These hopes for the LGBTQ+ community centered on striving to develop the community and stop experiences of discrimination from within the community. Lexi expressed, 'I... just wish that everyone would be more accepting and understanding of LGBT experiences.' Others shared similar ideas of improving the community.

I'd really like to see, um, an increased space for you know, discussions and acceptance of intersectionality across all...all axes. Across race and ethnicity, across gender and gender identification, across uh, asexuality to sexuality... I think we'll be stronger and more connected if we are able to come together and be willing to listen to and...and try to understand everyone's experiences. (Seattle)

I do think that if you are part of a minority group you really should be up to terms with social justice... Like, you definitely shouldn't be, um, participating in the oppression of others. (Moana)

Discussion

The present study sought to explore sexual and gender minority emerging adults' experiences of discrimination and exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community and the various forms of oppression that contribute to these experiences of exclusion. Participants provided evidence of various forms of discrimination that they witnessed or experienced when interacting with others within the LGBTQ+ community. The present study contributes to the existing literature by providing insight into how sexual and gender minority emerging adults feel more or less connected to the LGBTQ+ community, based on various forms of oppression and exclusion. Specifically, the present study highlighted experiences of gatekeeping, biphobia, acephobia, transphobia/cisgenderism, and oppression towards LGBTQ+ POC that warrant further discussion and exploration within future research.

Monosexism

Findings from the present study demonstrate how monosexism is pervasive within the lived experiences of bisexual emerging adults. Consistent with Ghabrial's (2019) findings, participants articulated the concept of "gatekeeping", where LGBTQ+ people marginalize or exclude other sexual and gender minorities. Although the quotes represented within the "Gatekeeping" subsection were referring to a broad form of exclusion across a variety of identities, the theme was especially relevant for those who identify as bisexual and non-binary

sexual and gender identities. Several participants within this study spoke about the experiences of biphobia, bisexual erasure, and monosexism within the LGBTQ+ community. Such findings are consistent with previous research commenting on the invisibility and nonrepresentation of non-binary sexual identities (Galupo et al., 2014). Bisexual individuals may have less connection with the LGBTQ+ community compared to lesbian women and gay men (Ross et al., 2018). Others have also observed that bisexuals may experience other LGBTQ+ people rejecting their bisexual identity and claiming it as a ‘phase’ (Ross et al., 2018). For emerging adults, attempting to develop a positive and affirming sexual and gender identity while navigating experiences of invalidation and exclusion from other LGBTQ+ peers may be defeating. Flanders et al. (2019) found that greater connection to the LGBTQ+ community was associated with higher binegativity as well as bisexual identity affirmation. In other words, while the LGBTQ+ community may aid in affirming one’s identity, bisexual individuals also report experiences of monosexism. Targeting binegativity and challenging non-affirming beliefs at a community level should be a focus for clinicians, intervention researchers, and social justice advocates. Our findings combined with past research highlight the necessity for bisexual-inclusive or bisexual-affirmative social support (Flanders et al., 2015; Flanders et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2018).

Our findings also suggest that monosexism and binegativity experiences could be dependent on the gender of the bisexual individual’s current romantic or sexual partner (i.e., same-sex partnership or heterosexual partnership). Ghabrial (2019) found that some sexual minority women in presumably heterosexual relationships felt a sense of “identity betrayal”. While Ghabrial (2019) made mention of this theme, our findings highlight the need for further research on non-monosexual individuals in relationships with other-gender partners and their experiences with gatekeeping and monosexism within the LGBTQ+ community.

Genderism/Cisgenderism

Overall, gender minorities did not feel their identities had space within the broader LGBTQ+ community, potentially due to the impacts of cisgenderism within the LGBTQ+ community. Transgender and gender minorities face a great deal of discrimination (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Ghabrial, 2019; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Previous research found that some advocates had trouble including transgender and genderqueer identities into the LGBTQ+ community and social activism movements (Stone; 2009). Our findings are consistent with previous research on genderism within the LGBTQ+ community in demonstrating how genderism/cisgenderism contributed to feelings of social exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community (Farmer & Byrd, 2015; Ghabrial, 2019). More research needs to examine experiences of in-group discrimination among gender minority subcommunities to understand the potential marginalization transgender and gender minority individuals face within the LGBTQ+ community-especially among emerging adults and how it affects emerging adults' gender identity development.

Acephobia

Participants' experiences of witnessing acephobia are a novel finding and contribution to the literature. Very little has been studied about asexual individuals, especially asexuals' experiences with the LGBTQ+ community. However, our findings suggest that those who identify as asexual may experience exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community. Individuals who identify as asexual face unique challenges pertaining to their sexual identity (i.e., pathologizing low sexual desire as possible symptoms of depression) that are perpetuated within the heterodominant society as well as the LGBTQ+ community (Chasin, 2015; MacInnis & Hodson, 2012). Experiencing further devaluation and invisibility in both the dominant heterosexist culture

and the LGBTQ+ community may leave those with asexual identities feeling isolated, thereby potentially impacting their mental health. Research on asexuality, sexual identity development among asexual individuals, and experiences with discrimination are lacking within the field of psychology and should be further explored.

LGBTQ+ People of Colour

LGBTQ+ people of colour face unique experiences of prejudice due to the intersectional nature of heterosexism, cisgenderism, and racism. Experiencing racism within the LGBTQ+ community has the potential to catalyse identity conflict between LGBTQ+ people of colour's sexual, gender, and racial or ethnic identity (Balsam et al., 2011). Our findings demonstrated that LGBTQ+ people of colour lack inclusion and representation within the LGBTQ+ community, media, and within LGBTQ+ organizations. Racial and ethnic minorities are at risk for feeling invisible and further marginalised within LGBTQ+ community due to racism perpetuated within predominately White LGBTQ+ communities (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; O'Byrne et al., 2014). Sexual and gender minorities who have intersecting racial or ethnic identities may feel that the liberation of the LGBTQ+ community is primarily a White phenomenon that does not include or capture the experiences of people of color (Sarno et al., 2015). LGBTQ+ organizations and college diversity centers should push for visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ emerging adults with various intersecting identities with their advertisements and other resources. Doing so may assist in addressing forms of structural racism and, in turn, may reduce feelings of exclusion among LGBTQ+ people of colour. Additionally, future research should explore more specifically the experiences of people of colour within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the unique experiences of exclusion and discrimination LGBTQ+ people of colour may face in accessing the resources of the LGBTQ+ community.

Implications

These results have important implications for making space for and increasing conversations about intersectionality within the LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ organizations, and school diversity centers—of which are especially relevant for emerging adults. LGBTQ+ organizations and diversity centers should focus on intragroup dialogue and understanding experiences from within the community to cultivate support. Such intragroup dialogues among LGBTQ+ individuals with diverse and intersecting identities may allow for rich discussion and opportunities for individuals to grapple with privileged aspects of their identities (e.g., male privilege, White privilege, cisgender privilege) and explore how such identities may hold power and restrict other voices within the community (Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, & Wimsatt, 2010; Nadal, 2013). Ford and Orlandella (2015) found that intragroup dialogues supported White college students in increasing interactions with people of various backgrounds and improving their knowledge, awareness, and skills in engaging issues of racial injustice. To further assist in strengthening the LGBTQ+ community and reducing exclusion, queer organizations should conduct advocacy work that educates LGBTQ+ individuals on the complexities of various forms of oppression and how it may disenfranchise those with various intersecting identities (Ghabrial, 2017). LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations can consider policy initiatives that seek to dismantle the phenomenon of ‘gatekeeping’. Doing so may increase inclusion of marginalised groups within the LGBTQ+ community (i.e., bisexual and other non-binary sexual identities, asexual, gender minorities, LGBTQ+ people of colour).

Limitations & Conclusion

The current study yielded findings about the experiences of exclusion and discrimination within the LGBTQ+ community, however these findings are not generalizable or conclusive given the qualitative methodology (Glesne, 2006). First, it is important to note that the members of the research team identified as White and highly educated individuals. The knowledge generated from the research team's interpretations may be limited or biased given the privileged identities. The convenience sample of LGBTQ+ participants were predominately White/European American; thus, we caution the readers regarding the transferability of the findings. With this, practitioners or educators should not take the findings as the '*only* true story' and should engage openly with individuals about their personal experiences within the LGBTQ+ community. As mentioned before, future research should aim to understand the experiences of people of colour within the LGBTQ+ community given the intersecting systems of oppression that LGBTQ+ people of colour face. Another limitation is that the participants were mostly recruited from LGBTQ+ organizations, university diversity centers, and LGBTQ+ psychology listservs. Recruiting from LGBTQ+ specific venues may have biased the sample, in that the majority of participants were well educated regarding social justice and issues of discrimination and oppression within the LGBTQ+ community.

Despite these limitations, the present study has provided insight into multiple forms of discrimination specific groups of sexual and gender minorities may experience within the LGBTQ+ community. Findings show how monosexism, genderism/cisgenderism, acephobia, and racism are oppressive and restrict the opportunities of subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community. Continued exclusion and discrimination within the LGBTQ+ community exacerbates the White, cisgender, patriarchy of the larger LGBTQ+ community and further erodes progress towards integration as a unified, collective group. Restriction of opportunities

reduces the ability to access community-level resources and promotes systems of oppression within a community that presumably values acceptance and inclusion (Meyer, 2015). Findings have implications for further research and practice to support specific subgroups within the community and to inform potential advocacy and interventions aimed at the broader community.

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Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Ethnic Identity	Study Participation ^a
Alex	25	Lesbian	Gender Queer	They/them/theirs	White	I
Amadi	25	Bisexual	Cisgender Male	He/him/his	Black	I, M*, F
Jenny	23	Lesbian	Nonbinary Transgender Woman	She/her/hers	White	I, M
Kendra	25	Bisexual	Cisgender Female	She/her/hers	White	I
Lexi	25	Gay	Cisgender Female	She/her/hers	White	I, M, F
Moana	21	Bisexual	Cisgender Female	She/her/hers	Polynesian	I, M
Oscar	23	Gay	Cisgender Male	He/him/his	Latinx	I, F
Oliver I	22	Bisexual	Gender Queer	They/them/theirs	White	I, M
Oliver II	20	Queer	Agender	They/them/theirs	White	I
Pega	21	Queer	Cisgender Female	She/her/hers	White	I
Seattle	24	Gay	Cisgender Male	He/him/his	White	I, M, F
Squid	22	Bisexual	Cisgender Male	He/him/his	White	I, M, F
Summer	23	Bisexual	Cisgender Female	She/her/hers	Armenian	I, M
Walter	24	Gay	Cisgender Male	He/him/his	White	I, M

^aI= interview, M= Member checking, F= Focus Group, *= Amadi was the only participant who responded to member checking the focus group transcript. All other participants were unable to review focus group transcripts.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency	Variable	Frequency
Relationship Status		Highest Level of Education	
Single	5	Graduate School	5
Married Heterosexual Relationship	1	Bachelors Degree	6
Committed to Same-Sex Partner	4	Associates Degree	1
Committed to Other-Sex Partner	4	Some College	2
Income		Community grew up in	
\$15,000 or less	9	Rural	4
\$15,000 - \$24,999	4	Suburban	10
\$25,000 - \$34,999	1		