The Exploration of LGBTQ2+ Communities

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Abstract

This paper will analyze identity, and what identity means for the LGBTQ2+ community with regards to physical places and spaces. Shared identity, and individual identity of the LGBTQ2+ community shape the physical places and spaces in which the community can live and thrive. Looking into the differentiation of sexualities today has led to boundaries separating the LGBTQ2+ community from cultural and social spaces, as well as physical places and spaces. Why these boundaries exist for the LGBTQ2+ community, and the justification for these boundaries will be brought to light from an urban planning perspective. The importance of the work of urban planners shaping cities and communities to create a safe and comfortable space for the LGBTQ2+ community will be explored. The boundaries presented by the LGBTQ2+ community provides a just social and cultural geography for individuals with shared identities to create a safe space and diverse communities and neighbourhoods. The border presented by LGBTQ2+ communities allows for the voice of LGBTQ2+ individuals to be heard, and the cultural and social geographies to reflect the acceptance of this community.

Introduction

The differentiation of sexualities in today's world has led to the implementation of boundaries between LGBTQ2+ communities within societies across the globe. LGBTQ2+ communities have been integrated in some societies for decades, and have shaped social and cultural geographies in many cities. This idea is brought to light by the boundaries created by LGBTQ2+ communities; identities and physical boundaries which have multiple factors that contribute to how social and cultural geographies are formed. Specifically, the boundaries presented by these communities provide a just social and cultural geography because having LGBTQ2+ communities provides the opportunities for people who have similar identities to be surrounded by individuals with similar values. This increases comfort and promotes diversity. These communities are just because they allow LGBTQ2+ individuals to be supported and connected, and the voice of the LGBTQ2+ community to be heard. LGBTQ2+ communities

provide the opportunity for individuals to live, work and play within a safe environment with inclusive cultural and social geographies. The geographies of difference created by LGBTQ2+ community boundaries also explores the topic of identities, how identities shape individuals, and how people with similar identities live and form communities. This paper will bring to light physical boundaries and how urban planners work to form functioning communities and neighbourhoods for people with specific, similar identities. Furthermore, the boundary created by LGBTQ2+ communities forms an inclusive environment for LGBTQ2+ individuals and creates just social and cultural geographies.

Cultural and Social Spaces and their Effects on Identity

Identity is what makes an individual unique. Identity can be summarized through sameness and continuity, while it can be shaped in two ways. The first is personal identity— aspects of an individual's personality which contributes

to who they are through actions; personal identity is shaped by a confident sense of self. The second is social identity, which is formed by identifying with members of a group having similar values and beliefs to oneself (Evans, 2018). When discussing the boundary presented by LGBTQ2+ communities, both personal identity and social identity impact the cultural and social geographies involved. By having communities and neighbourhoods formed by individuals with similar sexual orientation as well as similar beliefs and values, personal identity and social identity both play an influential role. Jazeel (2009) discusses how identity theory impacts human geography—more specifically, how gender and sexuality identities impact the emergence of queer geography. According to Jazeel (2009), “the emergence of queer theory and its incorporation as queer geography within the discipline, represents a paradigm shift and reaction against this uncritical early work on stable lesbian and gay identities” (p.167). Jazeel elaborates on how the legitimate boundaries presented by queer communities portray a specific environment for LGBTQ2+ individuals and allows for the emergence of queer theory to mold these communities. Similarly, Rosser, West, & Weinmeyer (2008) explore the prevalence of gay communities in many cities. The article reports on 29 individual’s observations of a variety of cities and dove into the well-being of many gay communities, further elaborating on the boundaries of the LGBTQ2+ community. Based on the results, London and New York were found to have thriving gay communities and neighbourhoods, while in other cities gay communities they have become more internet-based (Rosser et al., 2008). This shows that in today’s modern world, the internet has allowed communication to be extremely accessible, which has influenced the boundary of LGBTQ2+ communities. This allows communication to be easily accessible and the cultural and social geographies of these communities to become increasingly more fluid. In Rosser’s et al., (2008) research, many individuals reported about the prevalence of gay communities, and how the internet is used as a form of communication

among many LGBTQ2+ individuals. According to Rosser et al., (2008) “Large numbers of gay individuals, couples, and families appear well integrated into mainstream society; use virtual means to meet their same-sex social, sexual, and educational needs” (p. 592). The boundary separating the LGBTQ2+ community allows individuals with similar beliefs and values to form a community within that boundary where social identity creates a welcoming, comfortable environment. Also, the internet has created very easily accessible forms of communication and expression and has enhanced the well-being of the LGBTQ2+ community. Rosser, et al. (2008) explored the prevalence of gay communities and found that neighbourhoods with a population of gay white men are at a decline, suggesting that the development of new communities which are more inclusive and makes LGBTQ2+ individuals who do not identify as gay, white men feel welcome. Correspondingly, in *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (edited by Doan, 2015), urban planners looked at factors which contribute to the makeup of the LGBTQ2+ community. How LGBTQ2+ individuals work and play, and how their individual identities and social identities influence the cultural and social geography of these communities is explored by effective planning and the need for inclusive LGBTQ2+ space. Similarly, the importance for communities to have landmarks and historical connections to a space, is also reflected in the LGBTQ2+ community and its identity (Deverteuil, 2009). As per *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (edited by Doan, 2015):

“The riots at the Compton Cafeteria in San Francisco (as cited in Stryker, 2008) and the Stonewall Inn in New York City in the late 1960s sparked a more activist liberation movement which enabled the emergence of distinctly visible clusters of residences and businesses catering to the LGBTQ population. These discrete neighborhoods were immensely attractive to young queer-identified individuals seeking to establish their non-normative identities and create an alternative

and fully accepting community" (p. 3).

Taken together, the three sources discuss how identity shapes LGBTQ2+ communities, and how the boundary presented by these communities creates a more just social and cultural geography by forming communities where LGBTQ2+ individuals feel the most comfortable. Having LGBTQ2+ communities provides opportunities for people who have similar identities to be encircled by individuals with similar values and will therefore increase reassurance, forming diverse communities and neighbourhoods. Also, the virtual world has greatly influenced the LGBTQ2+ community by allowing communication to be easily accessible. The internet is used by the LGBTQ2+ community as a form of acceptance and expression. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ2+ are subject to inequality because they are a minority group. Deverteuil (2009) suggests that "...inequality must be treated as among the most pressing social and geographical issues of the twenty-first century" (p.433). The borders presented by the LGBTQ2+ communities are just because LGBTQ2+ individuals are marginalized in most public spaces due to the societal norms of heterosexuality. The emphasis and attention drawn on this community suggests the desire of acceptance presented by the LGBTQ2+ community. Identity shapes these communities. The social and cultural geographies created by the boundary of the LGBTQ2+ community is indeed justified, as it allows LGBTQ2+ individuals to be recognized and accepted by heterosexual communities, and by society as a whole.

Cultural and Social Effects on Physical Spaces and Places

Physical spaces and places impact the boundaries created by LGBTQ2+ communities. When discussing the boundaries implemented by LGBTQ2+ communities, analyzing actual LGBTQ2+ neighbourhoods, as well as looking at the components of functioning LGBTQ2+ communities, places and spaces influence social and cultural geography. The largest most influential LGBTQ2+ communities are in large cities. In Rosser et al.'s research (2008),

29 individuals living in large cities reported information about the livelihood of their gay communities. When analyzing LGBTQ2+ in Canada, the most popular neighbourhoods are in the highest populated cities; more specifically, in Rosser et al.'s study (2008), the only Canadian city discussed is Toronto. Taken together, larger cities have higher populations and therefore will most likely have a larger LGBTQ2+ community. These communities impact the social and cultural geographies by creating a vibrant, functioning, comfortable community for LGBTQ2+ individuals. In *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (edited by Doan, 2015), the authors explore planning policies which shape the lives and recreation possibilities of the LGBTQ2+ community through the creation of LGBTQ2+ social services, residential zoning and housing restrictions and the preservation, or the failure to preserve LGBTQ2+ cultural areas. All these factors influence the physical makeup of these LGBTQ2+ communities, and planners must consider them in order to create the most ideal communities for LGBTQ2+ individuals. The social and cultural geographies are influenced by the location of these communities, by having planners intricately work to create ideal communities in ideal locations, to maximize vibrancy and the livelihood of the community. *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (edited by Doan, 2015) brings to light that the influence of gay neighbourhoods, known as "gaybourhoods", are losing its value due to the idea of having specific neighbourhoods for gay, white men. The exclusivity of these "gaybourhoods" has led planners to begin to eliminate these exclusive neighbourhoods, and instead plan ahead to create more inclusive neighbourhoods for LGBTQ2+ individuals. According to *Planning and LGBTQ Communities: The Need for Inclusive Queer Spaces* (edited by Doan, 2015):

"The presumed demise of the gay village presents an opportunity to enlarge the planning horizon beyond the well-established queer spaces to explore the interactions between planners and LGBTQ residents in a broader array

of locations, and with a more diverse spectrum of the LGBTQ population... To achieve these objectives, planners must recognize that while significant proportions of the LGBTQ community have found residential locations outside the gay village, this does not mean that the concentrated gay village is irrelevant, but simply that its character is changing and needs more careful examination" (p.252).

The physical boundaries created by LGBTQ2+ communities are influenced by how urban planners work to form functioning communities and neighbourhoods for people with specific, similar identities. The social and cultural geographies created by LGBTQ2+ communities are just due to the insight put into the location, and urban planning components considered by planners.

Justifying the Geography of Difference Created by LGBTQ2+ Communities

The boundaries presented by LGBTQ2+ communities greatly influence societal geographies worldwide. Taken together, the geography of difference is prevalent in the boundaries created by LGBTQ2+ communities because the LGBTQ2+ population has struggled with acceptance by society for decades. Gay bars/nightclubs, pride parades, and same sex marriages have expanded the acceptance of the LGBTQ2+ population, and the boundary presented by the LGBTQ2+ community allows heterosexual individuals to be aware of the identity difference present through the LGBTQ2+ community. Because of this boundary, planned structured communities, and other social events such as pride awareness have increased the knowledge and has brought to light the social and cultural geographies presented through LGBTQ2+ communities.

Conclusion

To summarize, the LGBTQ2+ community is greatly influenced by identities: both personal identity and social identity. The identities created by this community influences the physical locations of LGBTQ2+ communities. Based on

the literature examined, the LGBTQ2+ community is larger and more influential in cities with high populations, and planners are developing new structural communities to maximize the functionality of LGBTQ2+ communities. The boundaries presented by these communities provide a just social and cultural geography because having LGBTQ2+ communities provides opportunities for people who have similar identities to be surrounded by individuals with similar values, therefore increasing comfort in and forming diverse communities and neighbourhoods. The border presented by LGBTQ2+ communities allows for the voice of LGBTQ2+ individuals to be heard, and the social and cultural geographies to reflect their acceptance. This border exemplifies justness by emphasizing the unique identity of the LGBTQ2+ community, and allows for this community to be heard, recognized and respected by society.

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