

Gender Expression in The LGBT Community

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Abstract

Judith Butler proposes the idea of “doing” and “undoing” gender in terms of how gender can be performative in our society. “Gender Expression in the LGBT Community: A Zine” observes gender expression trends in the gay, lesbian, and transgender community; each community, though is divergent from the heteronormative, still reflects the gender binary in some ways. With Butler’s theory of performative gender in mind, the zine assesses each “binary” within the subcultures and how society either accepts or rejects these trends. It is also noting that while the influence of societal norms is present in the LGBT community, the question of what gender is still comes into play.

In the fall semester of 2019 at Millersville University, I took Communication 330: Gender and Communication and created a zine titled “Gender Expression in the LGBT Community” (fig. 1). Victoria DeFrancisco and Catherine Palczewski define gender as “the cultural designations of feminine and masculine” (Palczewski et al., 2019). The binary system of gender creates two categories for people to fall into: male/masculine and female/feminine. Being that our society is dominated by the heteronormative, gender is expected to fall in line with sex characteristics and anything deviant is considered to fall outside of “normal”. The LGBT community itself is deviant from what society considers normal yet there is still evidence of the gender binary

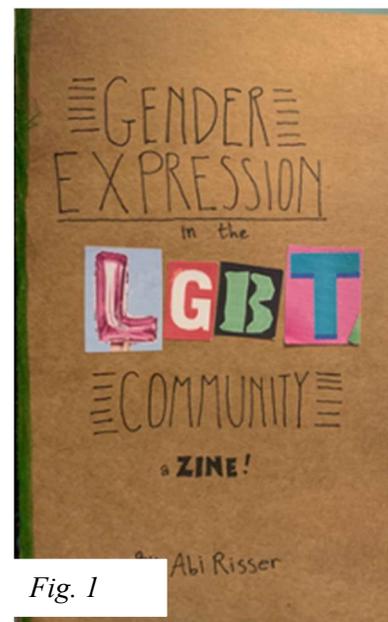


Fig. 1

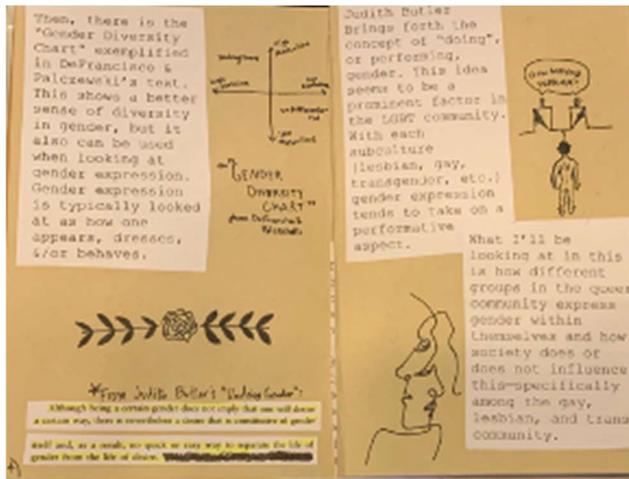


Fig. 2

in each subculture. While society influences and enforces the gender binaries, the LGBT community has their own diversity in gender expression.

In addition to DeFrancisco and Palczewski, ideas from Judith Butler were also significant in my research for putting together the zine. Butler created the notions of “doing” and “undoing” gender meaning that gender is performative (fig. 2). Heidi Levitt and Justin Maki were also important in my understanding of gender in the LGBT community. Levitt provided information for lesbian subculture while Maki informed me on gay subculture.

In gay culture, I found that there are generally two categories that model the gender binary: twink and bear. Gay twinks are typically more feminine and well-kept while bears present more masculine and rougher. Similarly, the lesbian community has femmes and butches, femmes presenting more feminine while butches present more masculine (fig. 3). In the transgender

community, the gender binary can be found in how transgender people present after transitioning. This is often done to gain acceptance from society or even to feel more comfortable in their gender identity.

I found it evident that society’s gender binary model and heteronormative approach can be reflected in expression in the LGBT community. Within each subculture, there seemed to be a pattern of masculine/feminine contrasts that are a large part of their cultures. What is interesting to me is how there is such a diverse array of gender expression, and that some expressions are more accepted by society while others create markers of what is considered deviant. Furthermore, Butler’s idea of gender performance is exemplified in the queer community with how we dress to fit various roles and identities.

The zine was created with colored cardstock paper folded in half to form a booklet. The contents are a combination of hand drawn/written words and pictures, printed cut-out images, printed cut-out sections from articles, and typed words.



Fig. 3

References

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