

How Those With Close Connections With LGBTQ2S+ Talk About That Community

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Abstract

There has been a steady increase in North America of people who identify as LGBTQ2S+. In a 2017 survey done by GLAAD, 20% of millennials identify as LGBTQ2S+. This increase would seem to increase the odds that soon we are all going to have someone close to us who is LGBTQ2S+. With that in mind, this research was done with the idea that having someone close to you that identifies as LGBTQ2S+ could affect the way you talk about that community. Critical discourse analysis was used through the lens of qualitative research, the use of a focus group and a qualitative interview from convenience sampling were done, and from those data collection techniques, language, behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions of the participants were analyzed. While many studies focus on the negative attitudes and language of society, this study took the approach of starting from the positive aspects of having a close relationship and being a support to someone who is LGBTQ2S+. Due to the nature of my subject matter, I chose to use gender neutral pseudonyms, gender neutral pronoun references and refrained from gender binary language

Keywords: LGBTQ2S+, LGBT, gay, support, language use, family, qualitative research, focus group, qualitative interview, critical discourse analysis, convenience sampling.

How Those With Close Connections With LGBTQ2S+ Talk About That Community

For human beings the first significant social group we belong to is our family. Family can mean genetic connections, but it can also be meaningfully created close social bonds by those who are not genetically linked as well. How we talk, not just to but about, persons in that group are important and can resonate throughout our social world. This research paper is a critical discourse analysis, which is the process by which individuals use language to accomplish personal, social, and political endeavour's (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1374). It will examine the in-depth ways that people with personal connections to LGBTQ2S+ people speak about them. It is a comprehensive look at how the words that the people close to us use matter, and why they matter, by looking at the data received from both a focus group and a qualitative research in depth interview.

In a qualitative research study done by Etengoff & Daiute, participants were recruited by email and given a semi structured interview regarding four research questions centering around homosexuality and religion (2015, p.400-401). The study focused on discourse analysis to take an in-depth look at the narrative of therapy clinicians regarding conflicts that arise between gay men and their religious families and how they could be mediated. These conflicts could arise independent of the therapist's advice and also at the advice from the therapist. This study highlights the issues with conflict that many people in the LGBTQ2S+ community encounter when their sexual orientation does not conform with their family's religious followings (Etengoff & Daiute, 2015). These conflicts are a concern with regard to family and acceptance/nonacceptance.

A qualitative study done by Roe examines gay and bisexual adolescent experiences with parental and family support that uses a phenomenological inquiry approach for its methodology

(2017, p. 55). While my research topic is not focused on persons who are LGBTQ2S+ themselves, this study is relevant because it involves LGBTQ2S+ person's perspectives and perceptions of their experiences with their families. This study helps to bring an insight into not only how important parental and family support is to those who are LGBTQ2S+ have, but what familial supports they wish they had had if they did not receive that kind of support (Roe, 2017).

Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom & Riggle did a qualitative online study of a convenience sample of parents of LGBTQ children, that used the framework of critical discourse analysis (2013). It involved online text boxes for open ended answers to questions. Through this study Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom & Riggle reveal that within a family context it is possible to have positive parental views regarding LGBTQ children, and that in fact this positivity can permeate many other aspects of their lives (2013). While most studies focus on negative effects, this one's focus on the positive was influential in my choice of research topic. I felt that looking at it from the view of the non LGBTQ2S+ person, but someone who was still involved in their life in a positive way, needed exploring. It was this literature that prompted me toward my research question.

Methods

Focus Group as Data Collection Technique

Critical discourse analysis looks at the ways that power structures within society behave and also how language is used by persons within that society. I wanted to see how persons who have close relationships with people who are LGBTQ2S+ spoke about those persons. It made sense to do the focus group first, to not only test questions, but to see if the research question was worth pursuing, or if I was on the right track (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). It is a way to generate a rich amount of data from those I am trying to research. Unlike a paper survey or

online survey, it gave us the flexibility to ask a person for more details of an answer if we felt like we needed more information. We used the focus group and an exploratory means to create initial data and see if there was any specific information that needed to be pursued or left alone.

Focus Group Question Construction

Together my data collection partner and I met several times to discuss our focus group questions in depth. We also had an email password protected and computer password protected shared Google doc to work on them when we were not together (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). We repeatedly referenced back to course material and ethics guidelines from our required readings to make sure our questions stayed within ethical parameters (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). We consulted various texts to make sure we were covering all the types of focus group questions necessary for our topic (Langer, 1978 as cited in Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

How the Focus Group Was Conducted: The focus group conducted was from a convenience sample (Berg, 2007) of a group of 21 students in a fourth year-university sociology course. Research approval was obtained through the university (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). The inclusion criteria for those who could be chosen for the focus group were those who had people, who were close to them, who were out and identified as LGBTQ2S+. There was no exclusion criteria if you met the inclusion criteria. There were four students total who fit the criteria who were selected for the focus group. I was one of the two people who conducted the focus group, my partner was chosen to be the moderator and I was selected to be the observer.

When and Where the Data Collection Happened. The focus group occurred in a room on the MacEwan University Campus. This room was made available to us by the university and the supervising professor. Before the focus group began, the observer and the moderator agreed to give the participants numbers for where-ever they decided to sit and use

those numbers as their pseudonyms (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). Their real names were not mentioned in the transcriptions or in the notes, to ensure participant confidentiality (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). For the remainder of the paper the participants will be referred to by the gender-neutral pseudonyms we chose of species of trees, Birch, Elm, Oak and Rowan. The focus group session lasted a total of forty minutes. The time before the interview session was used for setting up the space. The room has two doors, on opposite walls, with a rectangular table set up in the middle. Note cards, pens, and chairs were placed in the positions that the participants would be sitting, and computers, notebooks, and an audio recorder were placed in the spot where the conductors of the focus group would be sitting.

Data Collection. The participants were informed that they could enter the room. The moderator and the observer sat on one of the long sides of the table, while the participants sat with two of them across from the moderator and observer, and one participant on each of the shorter ends of the table. A recording device was placed in the middle of the table. The session started when the recorder was turned on. At that time a reminder was given that while all participants had given consent, they could still leave the study at any time and that their information would remain strictly confidential (Van den Hoonaard, 2015).

The focus group proceeded, with the moderator reading out the list of prepared questions, and the observer using the pseudonym numbers and a time countdown on the computer to note reactions, and times of those reactions, of the participants to the various questions (Emerson & Pollner, 2001). The reactions the observer was looking for were emotional reactions, like laughing, seeming nervous, anxious or frowning, or physical reactions like nodding, gesturing, fidgeting or avoiding eye contact. The observer did their best to have little to no facial expressions and limit their body movements to keep from encouraging or discouraging the

participants answers to the questions (Emerson & Pollner, 2001). The moderator started with a directive approach for the first few questions and then proceeded to a nondirective approach (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Directive approach was chosen as the first few questions to get the group to feel at ease, but the questions after were nondirective so that, while everyone had a chance to answer the questions, no one was required to answer them.

For the last few minutes of the question portion of the focus group, participants were informed that the note cards in front of them were for them to let us know anonymously anything they were not comfortable saying in front of the group. If they had nothing anonymous to say, they could just write their major and their minor and why they liked sociology (if they did like it). Finally, they were thanked for their participation and informed that they were free to leave. The focus group session took a total of thirty minutes. The end of the session was used for returning the space to the conditions the space was found in, discussing the session between the moderator and the observer, downloading the audio recording of the session and deleting it from the recording device to ensure confidentiality (Van den Hoonaard, 2015).

Qualitative Interview as Data Collection Technique

We did the interview after the focus group because we used what we had learned from the focus group responses to figure out what we missed, or what we needed to go more in depth about. Doing a semi structured qualitative research interview was an opportunity to get one individual's personal experiences and take a much deeper and closer look at those experiences. Our participant was also in our focus group and I kept the same pseudonym to remain gender neutral, avoid confusion and yet still retain confidentiality. I endeavoured to talk as little as possible and give Birch the chance to express her answers without feeling rushed (Seidman, 2006, p.78-79). I attempted to follow up on Birch's answers and ask questions if I did not

understand or needed clarification (Seidman, 2006, p.81). I strived to ask more about subjects and ask questions as delicately and thoughtfully as possible (Seidman, 2006, p.82-83).

We aimed to have mostly open-ended questions and I endeavored to not interrupt and to echo back some of the responses to show I was really paying attention (Seidman, 2006, p.85-86). I asked Birch to reconstruct experiences to the best of their recollection (Seidman, 2006, p.88). While I did not really ask Birch to focus on concrete details, that organically happened anyway with many of the responses (Seidman, 2006, p.88). I tried to use the interview guide as a guide instead of specific questions that had to be asked just the way they were written, to make it a semi structured interview (Seidman, 2006, p.91-92). I modified and skipped those questions that seemed to no longer apply or were not contextually correct given new information. I also endeavoured to tolerate the silences and only spoke again when it seemed like Birch might be getting uncomfortable or was definitely done answering the question (Seidman, 2006, p.92-93)

I did my best to explore laughter, as it does not always mean happiness and comfort, sometimes it can mean nervousness, bitterness, or due to being uncomfortable with the subject matter (Seidman, 2006, p.90). Despite the relative seriousness of the subject, there was much more laughter in the interview than in the focus group. Also, the context of the laughter had changed, it was not out of discomfort as often as it had been in the focus group. Here it was more in the context of happiness and comfort. I also followed my hunches, which turned out to be extremely useful. (Seidman, 2006, p.91).

Interview Question Construction. Together my research partner and I looked at our questions from our focus group and the responses generated, and decided which questions needed to be asked again and what new questions we could come up with. We also had an email password protected and computer password protected shared Google doc to work on them when

we were not together (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). We repeatedly referenced back to projects and ethics guidelines from various readings to make sure our questions stayed within ethical parameters (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). We continued to refer back to references to make sure we were covering all the required types of interview questions we felt were necessary for our topic (Langer, 1978 as cited in Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, Seidman, 2006).

How the Interview Was Conducted: The interview subject found was from a convenience sample (Berg, 2007) of a group of 21 students in a fourth-year university sociology course. Research approval was granted through the university (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). The inclusion criteria for the person who could be chosen for the interview was someone who had people, who were close to them, who were out and identified as LGBTQ2S+, and were willing to participate in the interview. There was no exclusion criteria if you met the inclusion criteria. Having already conducted the focus group and finding only 4 students who met the inclusion criteria, we knew we would have a small group to select from. Of those 4, some possible participants got picked for other interviews. We had 2 possible participants and had to choose between them. My logic behind my choice was that this person got to talk the least during the focus group, and I was very interested in hearing more from them. Having someone who had already been in our focus group gave us the opportunity to take the questions and answers we found were the most compelling, or needed expanding, and ask them either again or in a different way. It also gave us some insight as to what direction to take our new questions in. I was one of the two people who conducted the interview. The research partner was chosen to be the observer and I was selected to be the interviewer.

When and Where the Data Collection Happened: The interview occurred in a room on the MacEwan University Campus. Our interview participant's real name was not mentioned in

the transcriptions or in the notes, to ensure participant confidentiality (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). For the remainder of the paper the participant will be referred to by the gender-neutral pseudonym we chose from the focus group, Birch. The interview session lasted a total of forty minutes. Time before the interview session was used for setting up the space, thirty minutes was for the interview, and time after for returning the space to the way we found it. The room has two doors, on opposite walls, with a rectangular table set up in the middle. A chair was placed in the position that the participant would be sitting, and computers, notebooks, and an audio recorder were placed in the spot where the conductors of the interview would be sitting. The participant and the interviewers were placed across the table from each other, with the participant on the side of the table that could access the doors more easily, to make their entry and exit as quick and inviting as possible.

Data Collection. The participant was informed that they could enter the room. The interviewer and the observer sat on one of the long sides of the table, while the participant sat across from them. A recording device was placed in the middle of the table. The session started when the recorder was turned on. The interviewer took their questions from a sheet of paper while the observer took handwritten notes. Much like the focus group, the observer was looking for emotional reactions, like laughing, seeming nervous, anxious or frowning, or physical reactions like nodding, gesturing, fidgeting or avoiding eye contact. At that time a reminder was given that while our participant had given consent, they could still leave the study at any time and that their information would remain strictly confidential (Van den Hoonaard, 2015). The interview was conducted and at the end the participant was once again reminded they could opt out of the study, and the recorder was turned off. After participant left the room, the audio recording was transferred onto the computers of the moderator and the observer. Both computers

were password protected to keep the information private and confidential and the recordings were deleted from the digital recorder (Van den Hoonaard, 2015).

Data Transcription of the Focus Group and Interview. After the data was collected the audio recordings were then transferred to the computer application Express Scribe. This program was provided to me through MacEwan University. The transcriptions were done with notations of each two-minute increment, as we decided that was a small enough time frame to be able to go back to check the audio if we needed to, but also for referencing later on (Tilley & Powick, 2002). This being a critical discourse analysis, myself and my partner agreed that we would be transcribing the entire recording as close to exact accuracy as possible, including grammatical errors, pauses, and so on. We both felt this would help us when it came to doing our coding later. Each partner worked on fifteen minutes of the audio recording to create the transcription, with myself working on the first fifteen minutes and my partner working on the last fifteen minutes. For the focus group, I took photos of the hand-written observations I made and emailed them to my partner, so that both of us had access to that information. The handwritten observation notes had time stamps of the time remaining in the interview in order to be able to synchronize it to the transcripts of the voice recording. My partner documented his observations of the interview on his computer and provided access to them for me through Google doc. The Google doc was also used for access to the transcription.

Data Analysis of the Focus Group and Interview. An analysis of the data obtained through the focus group and interview, with observations from both, was done with the data I thought was relevant to the research question. Myself and my research partner used the application Express Scribe to do the transcription of the focus group recording and interview recording. I used the program MAXQDA2018 to do the coding of the transcript and the

observations of the focus group and interview. It was then used for data analysis of the coding. Through a critical discourse analysis lens, I started coding line by line. However, I found in some cases the whole line got coded and therefore word by word analysis was occasionally used (Charmaz, 2014). I then did theme analysis and from there did a comparison between incidents (Charmaz, 2014). I also, through coding, analyzed the observations to see if there were links between certain physical behaviours and specific language used.

Results

The results from the interview and the focus group were coded and have been organized by the codes that percentage wise came up the most, to the ones that came up the least.

LGBTQ2S+, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identification, and Language Use:

Participants of our study admitted they tried to use empathy, listening, inclusive language, appropriate pronouns, and so on, to show those from the LGBTQ2S+ community their consideration. Our focus group participant Elm summarizes their sentiments “I’m very much will say nonbinary or LGBTQ unless I’m talking to someone directly and I know their pronouns or how they identify.”. They all admitted that once they knew people better, they were less concerned about the language than with making sure the person was comfortable and felt supported and heard. Participants all emphasized listening and being there for the LGBTQ2S+ person they supported. Even if you couldn’t completely relate and had not been through the same things yourself, just that act of listening is something everyone can do. As Rowan put it, “there’s still definitely even a stigma that you feel even second hand from this issue. There’s understanding that this person is going through this isolating experience and self-realization and trying to be there for them, but being unable to truly understand is difficult, man.”. Some participants still mostly used the term “gay” as opposed to other LGBTQ2S+ terms, even though

this is a sexual preference indicative term and somewhat still within the framework of gender binary. There are many reasons why this may have occurred. One possible reason is that our participants were not of the LGBTQ2S+ community and therefore would not know all the complexities of the language of that community. Another possible reason is that some persons identify with more than one term. For example, those who are transgender can also be attracted to those who are of the same gender they identify with. Whatever the reason, the terms that were used did not seem to affect the general perception of care and concern for those who are LGBTQ2S+.

Representation, Inclusion, Acceptance and Awareness of LGBTQ2S+. Our participants indicated that media representation is more varied, respectful and inclusive than it used to be. However, they did have concerns that some companies and media were using inclusion to ingratiate themselves and to seem more progressive, in order to boost sales. Social media like YouTube and Instagram were mentioned as great places for representation, but also as a means of expression for LGBTQ2S+ and to find other LGBTQ2S+ to connect with. Oak talked about Camp Firefly, a camp for LGBTQ2S+ children, which was a good example of representation, inclusion and acceptance:

“I remember I went to a fundraiser with them and so it was all like kids from the camp and counselors who put this thing on and that was like a pretty cool event cause. I, they're way more comfortable than they were at school and certain parts of their identity that they usually keep pretty quiet they were allowed to be very open about.” .

Pride week was mentioned for providing representation, inclusion, acceptance and awareness for the whole city. Birch even mentioned during the interview, the time the prime minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, wore rainbow socks during Pride week. The focus group

presented arts, internet, and social media, like YouTube, as ways to help LGBTQ2S+ persons feel less alone. Elm expressed this opinion, “I feel it does help if there's more people who identify similarly to them. ‘Cause it makes them feel less alone in the world and from what I have, from the stories I’ve been told, it's a very lonely thing, at times”. School, school related clubs and activities were also mentioned as ways for representation, inclusion, acceptance and awareness to take place.

An awareness of LGBTQ2S+ and the age of that awareness, was not precisely the same for all participants, although some had similarities. In our focus group, Elm, Oak and Rowan all had a family member who came out, and it happened when they were quite young, Elm and Rowan at 6 or 7 years old and Oak at 12 years old. For most of them not only were they quite young at age of awareness, but also that to their families it was no big deal. This was Elm’s experience “We had a cousin and she was a lesbian and everyone knew, it's just a matter of fact it's just she likes girls but, very nonchalant about it in my family.”. For Birch, even though their age of awareness of LGBTQ2S+ was 18 years, and their family were biased, Birch’s attitude is similar to the others. This seems to affirm that having someone close to you opens up your awareness and can increase your empathy, no matter the age at which awareness occurs.

Supports, Information Resources, Means of Educating, Feelings and Challenges of Supporting LGBTQ2S+. Our participants were all supports for an LGBTQ2S+ person and had similarities in how they handled and perceived it. Just being there and listening were the most talked about. Information resources that were mentioned in both the focus group and the interview were the internet, media and social media. However, in the focus group, schools and university departments were brought up as creating awareness and a means of education in regard to learning about LGBTQ2S+ issues. Oak said this: “School’s very good at it, like [the]

internet. Um, like MacEwan sociology to be specific and I took anthropology and they were pretty on top of that, too.”. School LGBTQ2S+ groups and pride week were also mentioned.

The participants expressed feeling uneasy after the person they were close to came out or told them about something they needed support for. The reason for this uneasiness was not with the revelation, but rather because they did not always feel qualified to be helpful. Some of these person’s experiences were horrific and hard to hear. They all realized that the LGBTQ2S+ community still have a stigma attached to them. Mostly participants were grateful that they were trusted to be told by the person that they were LGBTQ2S+. Lastly, their main concern was making sure that the LGBTQ2S+ person knew that they were going to be there for them, no matter what. As Rowan put it so beautifully “If you liked them or loved them before why would that [being LGBTQ2S+] change anything.”.

Reactions By and To LGBTQ2S+. Reactions by the LGBTQ2S+ to our participants or those who were LGBTQ2S+ were expressed as very positive. There was consideration for what those in that community had had to endure, along with the attitude that fundamentally they were no different than anyone else. In regard to the reactions to those who are LGBTQ2S+, they were 50% positive and 50% negative. Living within a generally heteronormative gender binary society, here and in Birch’s country of origin, this is not entirely unexpected, but does show that there is still room for more acceptance for those who are LGBTQ2S+.

Family and Power. In our focus group, the participants Elm, Oak and Rowan all had a family member who came out and it happened when they were quite young. For these three their immediate family did not think coming out was a big deal. For Birch, it happened when they were older, at 18 years old, and it was not a family member. In the interview it was clear that Birch’s parents had very different attitudes toward those who are LGBTQ2S+ than the other

members parents. Birch in both the interview and the focus group talked about how China says they are progressive and tolerant, but in reality, are not. While they try and act progressive, this behaviour does not occur when it comes to their own friends, family and children. In recalling a conversation with their mother about LGBTQ2S+ persons, Birch relayed this story “I try and talk to my mom and she was like ‘ok I’s don’t care anyone else but like you can’t be one of them.’” . The power of the family keeps many from coming out at all to their own family. During the focus group, regarding supports and resources Birch said:

Especially like as my friend, she don't have any support from family. They're, like, her family just don't get it, they just can't understand it. They just, they still think it's a like, it's a disease or something. Yeah. So, she had to hide, so they- like, she can't talk, she can't post anything on, social media even. Like, her friends may talk to their parents, and she never know. So, she's just scared and lonely.

This shows how much power a family can wield in regard to perceptions of those who are LGBTQ2Q+.

Including and Excluding Spaces for LGBTQ2S+, Lack of acceptance and Problems with LGBTQ+ and how they present themselves. In both the focus group and the interview, we asked about spaces that were inclusive and exclusive. In the interview, Birch mentioned Edmonton in general and Whyte Avenue specifically, as being LGBTQ2S+ inclusive spaces. In the focus group our participants discussed other LGBTQ2S+ groups, pride events, the internet, social media, some family gatherings and school as being inclusive spaces. Spaces that were considered excluding were sports teams, even at below university school aged levels. As Rowan put it in the focus group “I know growing up, I played like football and hockey, and I, there was definitely still a toxic locker room environment there. As much as uh, as professional sports are

trying to strive for acceptance it's it's gonna be hard to do it at a grassroots level". During the focus group, both Oak and Rowan discussed some less immediate family members who were not as accepting. In both the focus group and the interview Birch discussed the lack of acceptance in their family, but also how in China the people judge how LGBTQ2S+ persons present themselves, specifically with gender nonconforming clothing. The data showed equal rates of lack of acceptance in both the interview and the focus group.

Physical reactions. The focus group was fairly subdued and serious. This is to be expected given the subject matter. However, being students who share a class together, there were moments of levity and laughter, although some of that laughter seemed to be nervous. Being students who have become accustomed to showing some sort of response to those who are asking questions (specifically teachers), there was a lot of head nodding. The nervous laughter did not seem to correlate to any specific word, whereas the nodding all related to confirming answers or showing attention. There was more laughter than I expected in the interview, and none of it was uncomfortable or even stressful, at least for me. All of it seemed to be related to language describing incidents that were happy or funny. Birch did manifest some nervous gestures, like playing with their hoodie strings. Having not observed Birch in other contexts particularly closely while wearing a hoodie, this may just be a habit that manifests when wearing that garment, and therefore not an indicator of nervousness. So, while I looked for physical reactions or behaviours linked to certain words, I did not find any.

Politics and Country of Origin. These last two topics were brought up the least. As we did not have any questions in the focus group about politics, this could be the reason. In the interview when we brought up politics, Birch focused on the federal government and Justin Trudeau, and indicated they had nothing to contribute regarding LGBTQ2S+ and the current

provincial government. In the focus group there were no indications by anyone other than Birch, that they had a different country of origin. So, once we got to the interview, I got to hear Birch talk about what it is like in their country or origin versus here. It made for the possibility of some interesting contrasts between Canada and that country, but more importantly is showed the difference in Birch's views of the LGBTQ2S+ and the views of the parents still in that country.

Discussion

My research came up with three top results surrounding how those with close connections to people who are LGBTQ2S+ speak about those persons. First, LGBTQ2S+, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identification, and Language Use. Our participants were very aware and respectful of trying to use the appropriate terms, pronouns and language that made the person they cared about comfortable, but also did so for all who are in the LGBTQ2S+ community, much like the results from Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle (2013). This supports my theory that when you have someone close to you who is LGBTQ2S+ that knowledge and consideration emerges in other aspects of your life. The idea of just being there and listening to those in the LGBTQ2S+ community, whether you can relate or not, is fundamental to being supportive friend and/or family member and can be done by anyone.

Second, Representation, Inclusion, Acceptance and Awareness of LGBTQ2S+. All the participants acknowledged that LGBTQ2S+ representation, inclusion and acceptance has improved and continues to improve in various forms, from media to schools. The age of becoming aware of those who were LGBTQ2S+ did not seem to matter, as the attitudes remained the same for all the participants. This also supports my theory that it is the closeness of the person who is LGBTQ2S+ that helps to bring an awareness towards others in that community.

However, being older when becoming aware does seem to suggest that a lack of acceptance or inclusion of those who are LGBTQ2S+ from the family you were raised with.

Finally, Supports, Information Resources, Means of Education, Feelings and Challenges of Supporting LGBTQ2S+. While all the participants were supports for an LGBTQ2S+ person at one time or another, they agreed the majority of support and information came mainly from the internet, social media, school and finding those where were also LGBTQ2S+. The most important support they emphasized was actively listening. These results supports findings by Roe, (2017). As for means of education about LGBTQ2S+, the internet, social groups, and school were all mentioned. This would seem to indicate that as long as someone has access to internet, social groups and education, they will have the ability to find information. Lastly when exploring the feelings and challenges of supporting LGBTQ2S+, I found that while it might at times be hard or uncomfortable for our participants, they considered being supportive worthwhile and were even grateful for it, much like the findings of the participants in the study by Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle (2013).

Something that was not mentioned at all was religion. The lack of any religious affiliation, speech or acknowledgment was unexpected. I was prepared for there to be many issues concerning religion and sexual orientation that were exposed by Etengoff, & Daiute (2015), yet this did not occur. This could perhaps be due to these being sociology students talking to other sociology students, and not wanting to look like religion influenced their views or lives. Another surprise was when discussing the difference between urban and rural spaces, neither religious nor political affiliations were brought up as possible reasons for the difference. In regard to politics, and the participants being sociology students, this was another surprising finding. This would suggest that students are not as politically engaged or invested as I

anticipated. It is also possible that they just did not feel like politics was a topic they felt knowledgeable enough to talk about. Or perhaps they felt they should not talk about it unless someone else brings it up.

The final unexpected outcome was the equal rates of acceptance and lack of acceptance in both the interview and the focus group, which I did not anticipate. Birch talked about how their country of origin is not very accepting, and therefore I expected the rates of nonacceptance coding to be higher.

Limitations

Some limitations of the study were as follows. First, the participants were all sociology students. As indicated in the focus group, sociology students already have, through their studies, some knowledge about the LGBTQ2S+ community. Second, there was not a lot of variety in the age range of the persons in the sample. A broader range of ages would have helped gain better knowledge of the views of various age groups. Third, the participants were all from a convenience sample. Being able to get participants from other means would help to gain more insight. Fourth, I only had four months to complete this study from start to finish; that is not much time to complete any research. Fifth, I only got to gather data from one focus group and one interview. More of both of these data collection methods would have created even more information. Lastly, only having four persons total to gather data was limiting, even if it was in depth. Having more people participate would help to support the results of this study.

Future Studies

This study could be replicated with different age groups, different socioeconomic levels, from rural and from urban communities, religious orientations etc. After the interview with Birch, it occurred to me that it would be beneficial to be able to look at people who are new to

Canada at different ages to see what their attitudes are when they first move here, and then years later. This could help to see if attitudes truly change with exposure. Religion is a topic that often impacts those who are LGBTQ2S+ yet it did not come up in our study. A religious component or focus regarding LGBTQ2S+ could be a possible focus for further research among university sociology students, or even those who are not students. The same could also be done using a political component.

Conclusion

This research paper examined the ways that people with personal connections to LGBTQ2S+ people speak about them. Here I looked in depth at LGBTQ2S+, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identification, and Language Use, and found that people who care for those who are LGBTQ2S+ consider and integrate that knowledge and language into other aspects of their lives. Through increased knowledge of those in this community, the number of people who feel it is safe to “come out” or to live their authentic lives will only increase. The improvement in Representation, Inclusion, Acceptance and Awareness of LGBTQ being better than it was, and on the increase, will also increase the spaces deemed to be accepting and decrease spaces where it is not.

Lastly, Supports, Information Resources, Educating Others, Feelings and Challenges of Supporting LGBTQ2S+. For the majority of the findings the outcomes were positive. Even when some of the language and attitudes from others were negative, the language and attitude of our participants was still positive. The implications of these results are that as more and more people end up with someone close to them who identify as LGBTQ2S+, the more the language used to talk about them not only becomes mainstream, but positive rather than negative. This will also hopefully create a greater attitude of tolerance to all those who are minorities.

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Appendix

Reflexivity. There are a variety of ways my positionalities may have impacted the interview. Being the parent of two children who identify as LGBTQ2S+ gave me a unique positionality, in regard to the interview. I have similarly been where those in the focus group and interview have been, as a support for someone who is LGBTQ2S+ but have done so mostly from my position as a parent which none of the participants were. When I was in my teens and early 20's the AIDS-HIV crisis was in full swing. I did have friends that came out to me and I always supported them. So, I have been in their position, just during a different era. I am also in the positionality of student, but I am a good 20 years older than the majority of my classmates. That may have impacted the questions we chose to use. I have also had many more years of work and life experience than my classmates. During the interview I tried to use those years of parenting and customer service experience to help make Birch feel comfortable, safe, and open to answering our questions.

This could have limitations in that I have been dealing with this from an older generational and parental standpoint. That was part of the reason I wanted to do this study, to see how those from the younger generation deal with this issue. There is also the limitation that I came at this research from a positive perspective. However, finding research regarding negative attitudes and behaviours towards those who are LGBTQ2S+ are plentiful, whereas coming at it from a positive perspective is much harder to find. I am hoping this is the start of research that will begin to fill that informational gap. While I admit that having persons close to me that identify as LGBTQ2S+ will present some challenges to me with keeping my data collection and analysis as unbiased as possible. However, I continued to try to look back at my notes and my work with as open a mind as I could.

I have tried to keep a mini journal about my thoughts, reflections and ideas throughout the process of doing this research (Emerson & Pollner, 2001, Lempert, 2007). I have not always been consistent, but I have found it enormously helpful when having stray ideas and thoughts come into my head to have somewhere to put them. It was also good for after the interview to have somewhere to put my reflections, as this time I did not do the observational data, and therefore was not writing down my impressions as I was having them. Keeping an open mind, trying to stay present and following my hunches has been very helpful. I realized at one point during the interview that my question from the interview guide was constructed in such a way that it assumed that Birch's parents lived in Canada. When I followed my hunch and asked for clarification as to where they did live, I confirmed that my hunch was right, they do not live in Canada. This changed the way I coded some of the data and made it much more precise.

Finally, I have to acknowledge that there was a paradigm shift that drastically changed how our society was interacting at the end of the course, compared to the start of it. By the time we were about to conduct the interview on March 12, 2020 just one day earlier COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization. We got our interview done and the last day of on campus classes happened one day later on March 13, 2020. So, while I have done everything I can to try and keep the chaos of the outside world from effecting my paper I cannot promise I have been successful. All I can say is I did my best. What has come up is a rise in racism towards those of Asian descent. The increase of anger and hatred of minorities and those who are "other" is always a problem in times of great social upheaval. My hope is that by continuing to have representation, inclusion and acceptance, of those who are minorities, the anger and hatred will disappear. That is the hope I have, that the world will be better for my children than I found it in.

Focus Group Interview Script

Introductory statement: Hey everyone, my name is (Moderator), and I'll be the moderator for today's focus group, which should take about 30 minutes, total. This is (Observer), she'll be observing and taking notes. As you know, this is part of a course, and we will both be getting marks for this. First, we'd like to assure you that all the information collected here will remain completely confidential, and password protected. We would only disclose your personal information if it indicated that there was a potential harm to yourself or a minor. So, you might be wondering why we're doing this study in the first place. We both have family members who identify as LGBTQ2S+, so we're interested in looking at the way people *understand and speak about* supporting them and other members of this community. Though we've tried to avoid questions that will make you uncomfortable, there is a chance that may happen. A potential benefit of this study is reaching a better understanding of how people grasp these concepts. We will be using the term LGBT here for efficiency's sake, but we aren't trying to exclude anyone, so feel free to use the terms you're comfortable with; we know language and terminology are important. For our research, (Observer) will be examining the ways that people with personal connections to LGBT people speak about them, and I (Moderator) will use these experiences to generate a theory about how people understand the support systems members of the community have access to. This is why our criteria required you to know somebody who identifies this way. We're doing this with an awareness that we're in a social media age so by all means, talk about *any* online behaviours or interactions if they seem relevant. Finally, you may opt out of this study at any time if you so choose. Does this all make sense?

Factual / Directive Questions: Move through these quickly but try to encourage openness and get a feel for the group's demeanor. Check time after Q3 and if you're close to a minute, this is good, if not, we might need to speed things up a bit.

Good. We'll start off by asking each of you to answer some quick questions about yourselves.

1. Please briefly describe why you chose to study at MacEwan? Expanding: What Year?

What is your specialization/stream?

2. Do any of you know each other from outside the class?

Optional Leading: how?

3. Is there anything you'd like to share about your interests outside of school?

- **Optional Leading:** Would you all say you're an Edmontonian?

"Thanks for sharing. Now that we know a little bit about each-other, let's move on to some group questions. I won't be choosing who speaks from here on, so please talk freely and discuss these things together. Time is limited, so I will signal when we need to start moving on to the next question"

Non-Directive Questions

4. Let's talk about the language used these days, what term(s) make the most sense to you for speaking or writing about those who identify as LGBT?

- **Optional Leading:** what is your experience with pronoun use?
- **Optional Leading 2:** Do you add the IAPQ2+ (Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Questioning, Two-Spirited, + Inclusive)

5. What is your first memory of someone you knew *being out* as an LGBT person?

6. (if not already mentioned) Before knowing them, did you see any media representations of LGBT people? **Optional Leading:** Was there anything particularly memorable about that portrayal?
7. What types of spaces are the most comfortable and inclusive for LGBT people to express themselves in?
8. Can you think of certain spaces that are more excluding?
9. What resources helped you learn about issues in the LGBT community?
 - **Optional Leading:** how about community or government supports?
10. What would you say are the most important among those supports?
 - **Optional Leading:** What role does family play in these social supports?
11. In what ways do you feel people should educate their friends and family on how to be supportive of LGBT people?
12. What kinds of experiences do you feel are the most helpful for this?
13. In terms of public perceptions, how would you say people in Alberta generally view those in the LGBT community? **Optional Leading:** Is this changing? What about institutional support such as laws or policy?
 - **Optional, time allowing** (check clock): If you feel like you have been a support to someone who is LGBT at some point in time, what did that experience feel like?
14. Is there anything you think we missed in these conversations?
15. Is there something you don't feel comfortable sharing with the whole group, please write it anonymously on this piece of paper alongside your Major and Minor. If you have nothing you want to share anonymously, just write why you like sociology, if you do.

16. Now that we're at the end of our questions, do you have any questions of your own about this focus group?

Concluding statements: Thank you all so much for participating. We appreciate your willingness to entrust us with your experiences. You may still opt out of this study at any time if you so choose. Just a quick reminder that all the data collected during this half hour will remain completely confidential, and password protected. If you need, you can reach us at Observer@mymacewan.ca and Moderator@mymacewan.ca The results of our studies will be available to you via our poster board, when it is finished.

Interview Guide

Introductory statement: Hey Birch thank you so much for agreeing to participate in our interview, which should take about 30 minutes, total. As you know my name is (Interviewer), I will be conducting the interview, and (Observer) will be observing and taking notes. First, we'd like to assure you that all the information collected here will remain completely confidential, and password protected. We would only disclose your personal information if it's indicated that there was a potential harm to yourself or a minor. So, you might be wondering why we're doing this study in the first place. We both have family members who identify as LGBTQ2S+, so we're interested in looking at the way people *understand and speak about* supporting them and other members of this community. We will be using the term LGBT here for efficiency's sake, but we aren't trying to exclude anyone, so feel free to use the terms you're comfortable with; we know language and terminology are important. Though we've tried to avoid questions that will make you uncomfortable, there is a chance that may happen. A potential benefit of this study is reaching a better understanding of how people grasp these concepts. For our research, I will be examining the ways that people with personal connections to LGBT people speak about them, and (research partner) will use these experiences to generate a theory about how people understand the support systems members of the community have access to. This is why our criteria required you to know somebody who identifies this way. We're doing this with an awareness that we're in a social media age so by all means, talk about *any* online behaviours or interactions if they seem relevant. Finally, you may leave the room, skip a question, or just stop participation in this study at any time if you so choose. Does this all make sense? Do you have any questions?

Factual / Directive Questions: Try to encourage openness and get a feel for participant demeanor.

Good. We'll start off by asking you some just general questions about yourself.

1. What is your favourite video game to play, and what makes it your favourite?
 - How long have you lived in Edmonton?
 - Where is your favourite place to go in the Edmonton area and what makes it special to you?

That was so interesting, thank you for sharing. Now we are going to move onto more LGBT related questions. Let's talk about the language used regarding LGBT.

2. What terms do you mainly use? Do you add IAPQ2+ (Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Questioning, Two-Spirited, + Inclusive) ?
3. How would you describe the experience for those who are LGBT here in Edmonton?
4. Are you involved with any organisations in the LGBT community, such as the Pride Center and if so, are any of them here at MacEwan?
5. Tell us about a time the person who is close to you was talking to you about what it's like to be LGBT. What kinds of topics did you discuss?
6. Open up: How do you think the local, or provincial government is representing LGBT people?
7. Open up: To what extent do you think the local and provincial government are supporting the LGBT community?

8. Optional Leading: How do you think they are/aren't being representational or supportive? (or simply "can you tell us more about that?")
9. In our previous focus group people talked about being the support system for their loved ones. Could you talk more about how you've supported your friend in the past?
10. Open up: What LGBT issues do you discuss with your family?
11. Where do you feel the most comfortable talking about these issues? What makes it comfortable in these settings to discuss these issues?
12. Since having an LGBT member come out, how has your family changed their language and/or behaviours in any way toward that individual ? Parrot back?
13. Open up: What was the most surprising thing you learned about a family member since the coming out? For example, my mom is a nurse. When she found out about my child identifies as (transgender), she told me about how her first nursing job was in a doctor's office where the doctor was gay. Because he was in the LGBT community, that community trusted him and went to him exclusively. She came in contact with all sorts of members of that society, especially those who were transgender. So, she knew WAY more about the subject than I expected. She had never told me that before. Did you have any experiences like that?
14. What kinds of conversations, if any, do you have with your family or loved ones about gender identification?
15. How has having someone close to you who is LGBT change how you look at social or community gatherings?
16. How has your consumer behaviour changed as a result of knowing someone who identifies as LGBT? For example: How does LGBT representation (or lack thereof) impact your decision to purchase or boycott products?"

17. What is your first memory of someone in the media representing the LGBT community?

Wind Down Questions:

18. What social media platform do you use? Tell me about your choice of the one you use the most?

19. What is the last show you binge watched?

20. Is there anything you think we missed in these conversations? Or anything you would like to add or change to your previous responses?

(Observer), is there anything you would like to ask or add?

Now that we're at the end of our questions, do you have any questions of your own about this interview?

Concluding statements: Thank you all so much Birch for participating. We appreciate your willingness to entrust us with your experiences. You may still opt out of this study at any time if you so choose. Just a quick reminder that all the data collected during this half hour will remain completely confidential, and password protected. If you need, you can reach us at interviewer@mymacewan.ca and observer@mymacewan.ca The results of our studies will be available to you via our poster board, when it is finished

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