

The Presentations and Possible Causes of Disharmony Within the LGBTQ Community: From the Experience and Perspective of LGBTQ youth

Xiyan Jiang*

Department of Education, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China

*Corresponding author: 112022020029@student.fjnu.edu.cn

Abstract. Under the background of the gradual expansion of the LGBTQ community in recent years, members of gender minorities have increasingly raised their voices on equal rights and non-discrimination. In addition to the pressure from the outside group, the LGBTQ groups' internal disharmony is gradually serious, which has a negative impact on both inside and outside individuals. Because youth at the stage of higher education have specific significance in studying gender minorities, this paper interviews seven LGBTQ youth through qualitative research to deeply explore the presentations: (a) marginalization and acceptance, (b) stereotypes and labeling, (c) discrimination and aggression, and some possible causes of internal disharmony within the LGBTQ community. To alleviate this situation, this paper proposes the suggestion of gender education (especially early childhood gender education), hoping to take appropriate measures for people of different ages. Meanwhile, gender education would help remove contradictions and misunderstandings both within and outside LGBTQ groups, and create an inclusive social atmosphere that makes gender diversity widely accepted.

Keywords: LGBTQ internal disharmony; gender education; gender equality; gender diversity; stereotype.

1. Introduction

Gender minorities which are referred to in this paper as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) groups always exist in society. In recent years, due to the higher acceptance of gender diversity in public, the proportion of the LGBTQ community in the population has been increasing. Therefore, the scholarships have studied diverse aspects of gender minorities in social life, and a considerable number of the research are to voice equal rights for them. Concern about LGBTQ groups is conducive to protecting their members' legitimate rights and interests, reducing interpersonal interaction conflicts, and creating an inclusive and friendly environment.

This article mainly explores LGBTQ groups in higher education and reasons are the following: Higher education has the most gender diversity, providing a large sample size to study LGBTQ group members [1]. Higher education also provides various opportunities for awakening and deepening students' gender awareness, segregating students from the existing family community and exposing them to knowledge concerning gender identity [2,3]. Accordingly, the study of LGBTQ groups in the higher education environment is diverse and representative and can preferably mirror the life status of LGBTQ youth in the current era.

At present, most of the studies on LGBTQ groups predominantly focus on their psychological development, inequality circumstances faced in education and work fields, as well as discrimination and aggression from the non-LGBTQ group. However, there is little research on the internal disharmony of the LGBTQ community, which also heavily affects the individual development of both group members and other cisgenders or heterosexuals. Hence, this paper adopts the qualitative research method and the one-on-one semi-structured interviews to communicate with seven LGBTQ participants to have an in-depth understanding of the views and experiences of the LGBTQ youth regarding disharmony within the community. Meanwhile, this study analyzes the possible causes of the contradictions within LGBTQ groups as well and puts forward feasible suggestions for raising

gender equality awareness among the public and ameliorating the discordant atmosphere in the LGBTQ community.

Admittedly, the attitude towards homosexuality in higher education has changed dramatically over the years: from assuming that homosexuality is deviant-- a way of transmission of infectious diseases, dismissing teachers who perform homosexual characteristics or expelling both male and female students who participate in relevant activities, to setting up LGBTQ student counseling offices on campus and incorporating sexual orientation into the university's non-discrimination policy [4]. Besides, in 2013, a British consultancy named Pink Therapy proposed to replace LGBTQ with GSD (Gender and Sexual Diversities) [5]. It can be seen that the acceptance of the LGBTQ community and the gender diversity concept has improved in society.

Nevertheless, some research demonstrated that LGBTQ students still encounter different degrees of marginalization and discrimination on campus. For example, self-identified LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) adolescents experience more severe peer harassment than their straight counterparts [6]. In addition, bisexual college students always face invisibility, marginalization, and exclusion from heterosexuals and other gender minorities [7]. Moreover, the participants of an LGBTQ student experience survey conducted by the University of Western Australia perceived that the campus atmosphere is malicious for transgender but more friendly for gay students [8]. Furthermore, the previous study has also explored the intersectionality of LGBTQ-colored college students and concluded that they are disadvantaged in the campus environment [9]. The researchers showed that the unequal treatment and infringement faced by LGBTQ group members mainly came from their non-LGBTQ peers, but a nonnegligible part came from inner groups.

Tran illustrated that ingroup microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ group members result from the norms formulated by the dominant group, thus making the social hierarchies and divisions constructed among LGBTQ students on campus [10,11]. As the categories among the LGBTQ community become discrete, the group members would become more exclusionary; at the same time, the more concrete definitions of identities mean increasingly gatekeeping [12]. Similarly, racism and discrimination have also been found within the LGBTQ community [13]. For these reasons, the disharmony within the LGBTQ community is apparent. The intra-group and inter-group labeling, differentiation, and discrimination profoundly impact the group members, which is also the research objective of this paper.

2. Method

This study utilizes the qualitative research method to explore the views of LGBTQ group members on their intra-group or inter-group stereotypes and discrimination. Since the semi-structured interview is a research method used to explore subjective knowledge, participants can freely respond to the open-ended questions. Hence, through the one-on-one interviews, the study would have a detailed and in-depth understanding of LGBTQ group members' perspectives on the internal contradictions of the LGBTQ community, which are based on their personal experiences and living environment. According to the participants' narration, the possible reasons for the internal LGBTQ community disharmony will be introduced as well.

2.1. Participants

A total of seven self-identified LGBTQ students were invited to this study. In this sample, one participant is a self-identified queer, and three individuals identify as lesbian and gay. Regarding gender identity, three identified as female, three as male, and one as genderqueer. These participants are native Chinese who grew up in different regions or cities with diverse environments. With a mean age of 23.4, they are in or have experienced higher education. Specifically, six individuals are freshman to junior year undergraduates, one is a master's degree graduate, and six of them are studying or have studied at the same university. Since the author would quote the participants'

statements in the following content, to keep confidentiality, seven participants are assigned pseudo names: C., G., L.L., L.J., W.K., W.W., and X.

2.2. Procedures

Convenient sampling is utilized in this research. The interviewees are voluntary LGBTQ acquaintances or friends introduced by others. Since LGBTQ is a minority gender group, many individuals may choose to conceal their LGBTQ identity from others or have no ability to self-identify, resulting in a small number of eligible samples. In addition, some LGBTQ group members are more sensitive to the internal contradictions of the LGBTQ community and reluctant to accept interviews about their discrimination experiences. As a result, there are only seven participants in this study with no financial compensation offered.

Before the interview, the proposed question list was presented to the interviewees, and their basic information was also collected, including age, gender, LGBTQ identity, and grade in higher education. The interview is conducted in semi-structured one-to-one online and took about thirty minutes to one hour each. During the process, both the interviewer and the interviewees maintained positive interaction and the questions raised by the interviewer were open-ended and progressive. The interviewer responded to the interviewee's feedback, gradually making them relaxed and willing to express their opinions and experiences more. Additionally, the whole process was recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Recordings were later transcribed verbatim. After sorting out the transcription, the author confirmed with the participants again to affirm whether correctly retold their narratives and viewpoints. Especially, because the participants are all native Chinese, the interviews were conducted in Chinese, and they were translated into English when the data was finally sorted out.

In this research, participants were examined by several questions: "What do you know about the LGBTQ community?", "Have you ever heard of anything negative or positive toward the LGBTQ groups?", "What do you think of the gender role in the queer-spectrum or trans-spectrum relationship?" and "Have you ever experienced or heard about any discrimination and aggression within the LGBTQ groups?". These questions are selected for excavating the LGBTQ intra-group and inter-group marginalization, stereotypes, and discrimination. The narratives from the interviewees concerning disharmony within the LGBTQ groups are adopted in this paper and contribute to analyzing the possible causes of such a situation.

2.3. Data analysis

After each interview, the recording was converted to transcription, and data analysis began after all interviews were completed. First of all, the practical information and the statements in line with the research topic of LGBTQ internal disharmony were screened out and fed back to the interviewees. At the same time, according to the interviewee's narratives and data results, the author speculated on the possible reasons for disharmony within the LGBTQ community. Afterward, the data of multiple participants were collated, and the analysis was drawn according to generality and individuality. In this paper, the data analysis is mainly carried out through several different aspects: (a) marginalization and acceptance, (b) stereotypes and labeling, (c) discrimination and aggression, and (d) possible causes behind internal disharmony in LGBTQ.

3. Result

The narrations of the seven participants revealed that the LGBTQ community has certain intra-group and inter-group disharmony, and individual groups are unacceptable and misunderstood by the larger community. Nearly all the participants mentioned the negative impression and discrimination of different groups and displayed the salient impact of stereotypes and labeling on them. Although several participants admitted there is a positive role in labeling, there are more individuals who are disgusted with it. However, the majority of these participants currently live in a relatively inclusive

environment and have never personally experienced discrimination within the LGBTQ community. The possible causes mentioned by the participants or derived from the summary are diverse, involving the traditional dualistic gender concept, the public media, and the stigmatization of minority groups.

3.1. Stereotypes and Labeling

Negative comments and behaviors of someone in the group are easy to rise to the whole group, which causes people to stereotype the group to different degrees, and this situation is particularly prominent in the LGBTQ community. These stereotypes exist not only intra-group but also inter-group. Labeling is a symbolic tool to strengthen stereotypes, which is detrimental to the development of LGBTQ group members.

As for group G(Gay), participants expressed more negative comments towards it, and several of them illustrated that the G group always pays more attention to individual appearances and has been experiencing serious stigmas, such as the major transmitter of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, the passive role in group G is usually considered to have traditional feminization characteristics, such as "butch". L.L. said that "gay is always considered as a feminized and feminine boy", and X. added that "boys who prefer exquisite self-appearance may be considered gay while many straight men also would like to dress up themselves".

Labeling is more likely to appear within the groups, usually in the form of tags or letter symbols. In both L(Lesbian) and G groups, active and passive roles are divided by specific symbols, but this labeling is less mentioned in other minority gender groups with participants basically reflecting that it exists in the homosexual community. Both C. and G. said that labeling does have some impact on them. "In the past, I was more concerned about my active or passive role in the group, however, this impact gradually decreased as I grew", and G. complained that "when others asked about my role in the homosexual relationship, I was extremely confused. And later I deliberately search for these symbolic labels on the Internet, but there is no clear standard of them, leading to the continuous change of my self-positioning of the role". Although other participants did not mention the specific impact of labeling on them, they all took a negative attitude towards it, believing that it was undoubtedly deleterious to LGBTQ group members and their relationships. As W.W. considered, "this labeling will destroy the internal ecology of the LGBTQ community".

Labeling, on the other hand, is reflected in the differentiation of the LGBTQ community. In essence, LGBTQ is also one of the presentations of symbolization of minority gender groups. Recently, with the expansion of the group size of gender minorities, internal differentiation has intensified. C. and X. mentioned that "the gap between the two groups of L and G is widening", and "the stigmatization of group G makes some lesbians desire to be separated from it". W.W. even illustrated that "some stereotypes and labeling would weaken the living force of the LGBTQ community." Internal differentiation endangers the internal unity of LGBTQ groups, making the power of a few people more dispersed.

3.2. Marginalization and Unacceptance

LGBTQ is a minority gender group that experiences marginalization in a maintain dual-gender society, thus making them naturally have a poor sense of identity in the society and usually encounter a hostile situation or being ignored. Therefore, it is difficult to fully develop themselves in such an environment and similar situations also exist within the LGBTQ community.

Due to no uniform criteria for dividing LGBTQ groups, LGB groups are divided according to sexual orientation, while T (Transgender) group is distinguished judging by gender identity, and Q (Queer) group is a more extensive group that does not define themselves in terms of sexual orientation and gender. Meanwhile, the group with a more significant number, such as Group LGB, would marginalize the smaller groups of T and Q. In the interview, three of the participants said they "know little about the T group" or "have no T group acquaintances". Except for a queer, all the participants explained they were not familiar with the Q group to varying degrees.

Different groups in the LGBTQ community bear different degrees of pressure, which come not only from outside the community but also from other groups inside. For example, the instability of group B(Bisexual)'s sexual orientation leads to low acceptance in both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Many participants commented that "group B is undesirable among LGBTQ groups" or "there is apprehension about the emotional loyalty of the B group". Besides, T and Q groups encounter more misconceptions than the LGB groups. Their low acceptance may be due to people's deficiency of knowledge and understanding. L.L. stated, "I think the most common reasons for the disagreement with self-physiological gender are the original family problems and the sequelae of great stimulation". For the Q group, W.K. said, "it seems to be a kind of freedom without rules, and everything can be done". In addition, some minority gender groups, mainly T and Q, often display the appearance of avant-garde fashion to highlight their personality, which is difficult to be accepted by individuals who prefer to follow the mainstream style.

Through analyzing the interviewees' narrations, it is found that LGBTQ group members do not fully understand their community, especially some groups inside. It seems that they usually know more about the LGB groups. However, they are more likely to misunderstand, ignore or even segregate from the T and Q groups, inducing salient marginalization and unacceptance within this minority gender community.

3.3. Discrimination and Aggression

When asked whether there would be discrimination within the LGBTQ community, all participants affirmed the intra-group and inter-group discrimination without hesitation. Owing to being in a relatively inclusive living environment with a limited number of LGBTQ peers around, the seven participants showed that they had never personally experienced discrimination from other group members while some of them had heard about others' relevant experiences. Among the community, W.W. illustrated the intra-group disdain chain: "some people rank different groups according to the number of group members, the degree of spread, or even the records of marriage registration in a certain country". Besides, L.J. actively mentioned discrimination within group G, and L.L. also talked about the discrimination of the active role against the passive role and the discrimination of the passive role itself in the G group.

Interviews revealed that most participants would closely link the discrimination within the LGBTQ community and the marginalization of groups, resulting in similar responses to these two questions. On the other hand, the internal discrimination of LGBTQ groups described by participants is basically due to stereotypes, many of which are from the news or heated topics on the Internet. Thus, although there are few LGBTQ members who suffer from internal discrimination, it still strongly attracts the attention of a significant number of gender minorities.

3.4. Possible Causes behind Internal Disharmony in LGBTQ

Interviews demonstrated various causes for disharmony within the LGBTQ community. Specifically, most participants' responses mainly reflect three reasons: the tremendous impact of the traditional binary gender concept, the penetration of the public media into people's lives, and the stigmatization caused by the behaviors of some group members.

Although the LGBTQ community is originally a diversified group separated from the traditional dual gender, because of the social mainstream gender concept and its tremendous influence on people from childhood, a part of the gender minorities would still substitute the dual gender concept into the LGBTQ community. The most obvious implication on the LGBTQ group members is probably the dualistic gender image, mainly regarding persons' appearance and personality. G. and W.K., as two females with short hair, emphasized others' direct definition of their identity and gender role through their length of hair and dressing style. Furthermore, the dual gender concept also intersects with the patriarchal social structure. L.L. said that "people with traditionally masculine characteristics are more popular in LGBTQ groups," and X. discussed that "the concept of male superiority also presents saliently in the LGBTQ community", evidencing the profound influence of inherent social concepts.

Additionally, in the era of the speedy development of the Internet, the mass media is the primary intermediary for people's information exchange, and the LGBTQ relevant content does occupy some space on the media platform. As L.J. said, "compared with mainstream media, We Media (a way in which the general public could release their own works through the Internet and other channels) has a more significant impact on LGBTQ groups". W.W. added, "publishing works on the media platform usually carry tags to attract views, and this undoubtedly would aggravate the labeling of LGBTQ groups." Her words explained that people are more likely to focus their attention on individuals and then may quickly turn those negative performances into group stereotypes.

As for the poor behavior of some LGBTQ members, one thing the public needs to admit is there would be such individual behaviors in any group. However, the LGBTQ group is a sexual minority, a more sensitive group with limited social acceptance, so they enjoy lower tolerance and a more robust reaction to their negative performance. Participants generally acknowledged the poor behavior of some people in the LGBTQ community, and their attitude towards it is mostly helpless. Specifically, more than one participant mentioned the problems of cheating, surrogacy, promiscuity, and unreasonable individual behaviors in public. In this case, poor behaviors, which lead to the stigmatization of some groups and are always treated in a laissez-faire way, became one of the most common causes for the internal disharmony of LGBTQ groups, intensifying their stereotypes and inside separation.

4. Discussion

This paper conducted in-depth interviews with seven LGBTQ group members and reflected on the three main aspects and some possible reasons for the within-group disharmony. The research concluded that the unacceptance within the LGBTQ community is mainly reflected in several smaller groups, to be more specific, group B with unstable factors, group T with different physiological gender, and group Q with rare understanding. Moreover, stereotypes and labeling considerably impact LGBTQ groups, and negative impressions and stigmatization aggravate the re-differentiation within the community. Although it is an inclusive and diverse group, discrimination still prevails among and within LGBTQ groups. The traditional dualistic gender concept, the guidance of the public media, and the poor behavior of minorities are the possible dominant reasons for the internal disharmony in the LGBTQ community mentioned above.

4.1. Result analysis

Labeling and symbolization are primarily produced to spread the gender diversity concept as well as increase the social attention of LGBTQ groups. They play a positive role in making more people know about sexual minorities. However, due to large-scale dissemination, labeling and symbolization have negatively affected the internal environment of the LGBTQ community and its group members, at the same time, mass media plays a critical role in it.

For example, advertisements portray traditional gender impressions, and traditional media, especially television, continue to neglect or stereotype LGBTQ groups [14]. In order to reduce the stereotyped influence, LGBTQ groups must establish correct values and lessen individual poor behaviors. Recently, a study has proposed a method called the Gender Identity Scale (GIS) to correctly guide different types of genderqueers and nonbinary genders to self-identify through non-tagging means [15]. Guiding the media and public to utilize labels and symbols appropriately is momentous to prevent internal differentiation. Accordingly, it is time to reduce some specific tags which solidify the image of sexual minorities when society's awareness of LGBTQ groups is widely improved.

In recent years, the transformation of sexual minorities from LGBT to LGBTQ and even plus (LGBTQ+) is a manifestation of advocating gender diversity and fluidity. Although queer-spectrum and trans-spectrum are divided based on two criteria: sexual orientation and gender identity, they are all non-heterosexual or non-cisgender. Weakening the criteria and emphasizing freedom and what is

undefined should be the essential pursuit of sexual minorities while the marginalization and unacceptance within the community indicate gender diversity and gender fluidity concepts have not fully penetrated LGBTQ group members. So, further efforts are compulsorily needed.

Tudino and Jellison explained that when people identify a group, they will be more likely to resonate with this group and derogate the outside group, which affects interpersonal interactions, and usually manifested as nonverbal behavior such as reducing interaction intention, causing discrimination and bias against other groups [16]. Through analyzing the interview, intra-group discrimination mainly stems from group stereotypes, while inter-group aggression is more related to peer competition and binary gender image. As an inclusive and pluralistic community, LGBTQ needs to unite together with declining internal discrimination and require social status with more reasonable rights to develop themselves in society.

Among the three possible reasons that affect the internal harmony of LGBTQ, the mass media and personal behavior problems are more likely to be solved through proper guidance. However, it is a sophisticated task to eliminate the binary gender concept in the LGBTQ community. There is research discovered that privileged heterosexuality and cisgender concept permeate and internalize in the cross-community groups of the younger generation [17]. Besides, genderism in higher education is a kind of compulsory labeling that endows everyone with a masculine and feminine label and assigns privileges to people who conform to the dual gender concept and punish those who do not [11]. Hence, it must cost a long time and take appropriate measures to intervene in existing concepts and establish a new one.

4.2. Suggestions

Notwithstanding, the administration in higher education has adopted a series of measures to improve gender equality for LGBTQ group members, including establishing LGBT centers, providing LGBT-related positions, and broadening the gender scope of non-discrimination policies [18]. This study believes that the ultimate way to ameliorate this situation is through gender education.

A study in Turkey demonstrated that the current gender education mainly focuses on gender representation, gender perception, and gender roles [19]. However, other research on gender and education predominantly focuses on the dual gender and its inequality. There is little literature on the gender equality of LGBTQ groups. The researchers who put forward to carry out gender education curricula in schools are even fewer. Since education strongly influences people's thinking and behavior, this paper suggests adding a compulsory course in gender education to the school curriculum plan. Gender education is instrumental in facilitating students' understanding of gender diversity, establishing gender equality concepts, and correctly self-identify, particularly for children and adolescents whose values are forming. Simultaneously, all gender educators are required to attend professional training to ensure the correct input of multiple gender concepts. For people who have formed gender concepts, it is a marvelous measure via the mass media to infiltrate diverse gender concepts and minimize their inherent dualistic gender concepts. Owing to the deep-rooted mainstream social concept, starting gender education from early age children is essential because only when the concept of gender is taking shape can fundamentally change it, and this is a valid way to figure out the internal and external problems faced by LGBTQ groups.

4.3. Limitation

The participants in this study are acquaintances or friends introduced by others, so the participants' perspectives would be inevitably influenced by the author. Because of the sensitivity of this topic, it is challenging to find LGBTQ group interviewees; this study only invited participants who self-identify as lesbian, gay, and queer. Hence, there is a lack of samples for other minority groups, and their experiences and opinions cannot be collected. In addition, although the respondents all come from different cities in China, all except one are from the same university, so the living environments of the participants are a kind lack diversity. The inclusive atmosphere of the LGBTQ community

reflected in this higher education environment also hinders exploring the internal disharmony of LGBTQ.

To ameliorate these problems, the research in the future can search for volunteers through the Internet and expand the number of respondents with different minority gender identities who live in diverse environments. If conditions permit, the study can appropriately expand the sample size, summarize the common narrations, and make the conclusion more universal.

5. Conclusion

This paper interviewed seven participants in higher education environments through qualitative research to explore the within-group disharmony of the LGBTQ community. It analyzed the presentations: marginalization and acceptance, stereotypes and labeling, discrimination and aggression, and also several possible causes of disharmony within LGBTQ groups according to participants' narrations. At last, the author put forward suggestions on gender education, especially from early childhood.

Through the discussion above, it is concluded that the potential causes of the contradictions within the LGBTQ community are interactive. Specifically, the most conspicuous is the impact of the traditional dualistic gender concept, especially the stereotype caused by the gender characteristics of male and female opposition, which is also reflected via the mass media. Hence, future research can deeply explore the manifestation of binary gender characteristics and images in LGBTQ intra-group and inter-group. In an environment with relatively conservative consciousness and low inclusiveness for minority groups such as LGBTQ, there is always an argument about using labels and symbols on social media platforms: the pursuit of dissemination and awareness while ignoring the correct understanding of gender minorities is to compress the network living space of group members. This argument is also one of the future directions worth discussing.

In general, the ultimate purpose of studying the internal disharmony of the LGBTQ community is to eliminate it and help society achieve diversified development. Many issues still need to be studied and solved in this regard.

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