ARE WE THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY?

‘The LGBTQ community’ as an idea has its roots in the Gay Liberation movement of the 1970s, and has gradually expanded to include other non-cisgendered and non-heterosexual identities, such as bisexuality and trans*.

However, there are challenges for the growing LGBTQ community in terms of uniting individuals who often have very different social and political goals. For instance, lesbian feminists have been accused of transphobia towards trans* women, and the campaign for marriage equality has been criticised for marginalising polyamorous queers.

The LGBTQ community is not a discrete, utopian, homogenous community of equals. Racism, ableism, classism, ageism, urban bias and sexism remain common, and largely invisible, problems within the LGBTQ community. For example, Morrish (1999) found that many queers of colour perceive the LGBTQ community as a ‘white’ identity category which tacitly requires them to suppress non-white aspects of their identity.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ‘FOR’?

Working towards common goals? Acknowledging a shared history? Legitimising identity?

At some level, every community is prefaced on a principle of inclusion and exclusion, because communities are always already structured around evaluating identities according to various criteria.

There is the risk that the discourse surrounding the LGBTQ community silences us by teaching us how to be ‘good’ queers.

A self-disciplining, pride-based community calls on us to be respectably queer (Ward, 2008), and socialises us into enacting performances of entrepreneurial, empowered and loyal queerness. This can make it extremely difficult for marginalised individuals within the LGBTQ community to express dissatisfaction.

QUEER ASSOCIATIONS

Queer Theory suggests an alternative way of approaching identity, through the “debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities . . . (and viewing of ) identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions” (Jagose, 1996, pp. 97–98).

But implementing this at a community level is problematic; does it mean rethinking the centrality of visible belonging to community inclusion?

Ironically, Queer Theory has historically carried strong connotations of political radicalism and confrontational visibility, with which many LGBTQ people are extremely uncomfortable.

So... what alternative ways of conceptualising community are available to us?

Bibliography


“We would never belong to a group that would accept someone like me as a member.”

~ Groucho Marx