University of South-Eastern Norway
Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science
–
Master's Thesis
Study programme: Human Rights and Multiculturalism
Spring 2022

Rine Kristine Ray

Identity, Speech and Liberation in a Digital Landscape

An Inquiry into Human Rights Discourse and Cultural Exchange in Queer Communities on Facebook

University of South-Eastern Norway
Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science
PO Box 235
NO-3603 Kongsberg, Norway

http://www.usn.no

© 2022 Rine Kristine Ray

This thesis is worth 45 study points

Total Word Count: 29,817

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction **5**
1.1 Context of the Research 5
1.2 Research Objectives 9
1.3 Purpose and Significance of the Project 9
1.4 Scope and Limitations 10
1.5 Organization of the Thesis 11
Chapter 2: Literature Review **13**
2.1 Human Rights Discourse on LGBT+ Rights 13
2.2 Queer Theory and Human Rights Scholarship 17
2.3 Internet-Based Communication Theories / Connectivity Online 18
2.4 Queer Presence / Community in Online Spaces 21
2.5 Political and Social Discourse Online 28
2.6 Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Communication Online 29
2.7 Why Social Media? Why Facebook? 30
2.8 Where the Dominant Literature is Lacking 31
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework **33**
3.1 The Post-Digital 'Public Sphere' 33
3.2 Intersectionality 35
3.3 Connectivity 38
3.4 Subalternity / Decolonization 41
3.5 Homonationalism 45
3.6 Queer Theory 46
3.7 Theories of Data Collection and Analysis 48
Chapter 4: Methodology **54**
4.1 Research Methods 54
4.2 How the Research is Being Conducted 54
4.3 How the Data was Collected / Data Management 55
4.4 Techniques for Analyzing Data 55
4.5 Ethical Considerations 56

4.6 The Quality of the Research 60

Chapter 5: Results **62**

5.1 Interview Respondents 62

5.2 Findings 65

5.3 General Trends 65

5.4 Critical Discourse Analysis 73

5.5 Proposals for Change 82

5.6 Analyzing the Methodology 84

Chapter 6: Conclusions **86**

6.1 Revisiting the Research Questions 86

6.2 Methodology vs. Theoretical Framework 88

6.3 What Was Gained from the Research? 89

6.4 Which Questions Remain After the Study? 90

6.5 Final Comments 92

Bibliography **95**

Glossary of Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
LGBT+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and all other terms that fall under the spectrum of non-normative sexual and gender identity. An alternative to the umbrella term "queer." For this reason, I use the terms interchangeably in my work.
Cisgender	When one's gender identity aligns with the binary gender they were assigned at birth; the opposite of transgender.
Outing	The act of revealing that an individual is queer without their consent; "outing" someone.
Intersex	A congenital anomaly of the sex and reproductive systems in which individuals fall outside the typical scope of the male/female sexual assignment binary
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
FTF	"Face-to-face" communication
HR	Human rights
SNS	Social networking sites
Active Users	Those who log into their social networking profiles at least once every 30 days.
Discourse	Any and all "texts" and the language/activity that constitute them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context of the Research

By the very nature of queer community-building, discussions about political issues, social justice and liberation occur frequently, even in casual in-group conversations. The distinction between “political” conversations and “regular” conversations is often not as clear in marginalized communities, because for many of us, political abuse and disenfranchisement are inescapable realities of daily life, and something that links us intimately to one another. This is as true online as it is in physical spaces. GLSEN’s national survey, “Out Online: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth,” conducted in 2010-2011 and published in 2013, lays out staggering statistical data which indicates that LGBT youth today experience the social paradox of high levels of bullying and abuse online alongside a widespread experience of community, safe learning spaces, and mutual encouragement. The data also suggests that LGBT+ youth, even more than their peers, experience a significant impulse towards social activism and community work (GLSEN, 2013). The intimate connection between political struggle and community is, I believe, at the core of queer life.

This history of queer individuals using the internet to build communities and advocate for their liberation is also not a new one. As I will discuss in my literature review, Richardson and Seidman (2002) have outlined a widely used history of queer communities online which range back to the early 80s; or, essentially, as soon as the internet achieved widespread public use. Despite running into conflict time and again with service providers and platforms (which sell private data, shut down queer-centered websites for being “indecent,” and even out individuals to their communities), the presence of queer spaces online has managed to keep pace with the rest of the digital

world, carving out territory on every major social networking site and forum-based platform in use today.

I have personally participated in online spaces dedicated to queer people (and those who fall under the LGBT+ umbrella, but who do not identify as 'queer') for years. Without these spaces, I would not have learned firsthand about the diversity of perspectives and concerns in my community; I would not have met certain people who became central to my life; I might have never even had the courage to live openly as a lesbian. As someone who moves in and out of these spaces on a daily basis, I have long been curious about the way that discourses of justice and liberation in these diverse communities have changed as the world becomes gradually more technological, and thousands of new users become connected online every day. I am also curious about the way that this seemingly immense level of connectivity might mask the reality of cultural homogeneity in online spaces. As much as it may feel that I am connected to people all over the world through my communities, all it takes is a step outside of English-speaking forums to realize that there is an entire world of discourse, community and identity that is totally foreign to me. I am afraid that those unfamiliar cultural spaces will fall further out of my scope of vision as major platforms become more tightly controlled, more homogenous in nature.

As a student of human rights theory, I am also deeply curious about the way that human rights rhetoric has entered these discursive spaces, how it interacts with intercultural exchange online, and what that means for queer liberation globally. After all, the human rights regime has from its inception been predicated on a decidedly Westernized desire for universality; the hope that one day, we will all agree on who exactly is human, and what treatment their humanness deserves. But the mere existence of queer people has historically disrupted this fantasy. We are not only regularly disenfranchised; we are denied the very reality of our existence. LGBT people constitute one of the largest marginalized groups in the world, and yet we are conspicuously left out of every major United Nations charter concerning international

human rights. There is no language whatsoever in these documents that specifically prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The only prohibition in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is against “sex,” which in this case many take as referring only to binary sex assignment (United Nations, Article 2, 1948). Beyond this, only certain UN resolutions dating back to the mid-90s contain language on gay rights, and in 2011 the UN issued its first ever report specifically acknowledging violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity (OHCHR, 2011). While it is certainly the case that smaller human rights organizations have discussed and advocated for LGBT protections for decades, their reach is quite limited, and many nations fight to justify rollbacks on hard-won protections by citing the lack of specificity on this issue in UN documents. After all, the 2011 report was one of the first to explicitly state that sexual orientation should be considered a protected status (Article 7, OHCHR, 2011). And still, despite any progress that has been made, there are still those in the human rights field who argue that pressuring other cultures and nations to accept the existence of queer people would drive them away from the project of human rights—and so we need to be patient, to let others go before us, to soften the edges over time so that one day we might carve out the space to enter. But the most vulnerable among us are always kept at the bottom of this chain of liberation. Why should we be satisfied with that?

It is certainly arguable to say that the human rights regime has historically failed to protect queer individuals and communities. Thus, for me, the way human rights language is used by queer people is a serious question; one that becomes much more complicated when intersected with questions of intercultural exchange and interaction between culturally diverse queer communities online. For many of us, it is not so easy to assume, as others have, that the internet has granted us with neutral spaces in which to discuss and diversify our experiences as members of a marginalized communities, and I wonder whether the introduction of a universalizing language (if indeed human rights rhetoric does function in this way) will have a positive or negative effect on the diversity of ideas and identity categories within these communities.

I want to ground this research on a few central theoretical ideas: firstly, through a critical reading of Rasmussen and Deleuze in terms of what is considered the online "public sphere," in which I argue that connectivity online is not necessarily a horizontal interaction between peers in neutral spaces; secondly, through Spivak and Crenshaw, as a way to analyze intersectionality and subalternity in these online discursive spaces, and which voices are not necessarily heard, or only given space to speak when it is to recall pain and humiliation; and thirdly, through Tuck and Yang, a critique of qualitative research itself, de-territorializing marginalized knowledge claims, and a refusal to code those who have been repeatedly Otherized, objectified, and used as extraction sites for knowledge by Western academia. I also want to draw on Jasbir Puar's concept of homonationalism, and the way this framework operates in international queer-friendly politics to insidiously reproduce the conditions for Western imperialism/interventionism. Finally, I will discuss the general framework of queer theory and Foucault's theory of discourse in order to provide context for the language adopted in many queer spaces, and to demonstrate the value of my critical discourse analysis approach.

Finally, a brief note on the chosen terminology for this project: as many others before me have, here I engage with "queer" as a blanket term for the vast diversity of people who are either self-identified or identified by State apparatuses as falling under a non-normative sexual or gender category. It is also a useful way to invoke the history of LGBT+ liberation movements and the broader field of queer theory, which contains many ideas I will engage with at length. However, I would like to recognize that this term has historically been used as a slur against LGBT+ people, and in many places is still used as a slur today. As a cisgender lesbian, I personally do not use this term to describe myself and do not condone its use as a descriptor for individuals who find it harmful or offensive.

1.2 Research Objectives

Many queer people are not able to live freely or express their identities offline, and for this reason, online spaces have become crucial to the formation of supportive queer-centered communities. It has been suggested by many that the global spread of internet usage has led to greater communication between different cultures, communities and social groups, and has even contributed to increasingly universalized conversations about social justice—particularly as it concerns human rights abuses and minority-group liberation. However, there is little to no scholarship surrounding the use of human rights language in online spaces, let alone with reference to a specific community or marginalized identity group. It is my goal to examine the ways in which queer individuals and groups online use human rights rhetoric on social media. Thus, the research questions I will be attempting to answer with this study are as follows:

1. How has human rights language been utilized in Facebook communities that are concerned with queer identity/liberation?
2. How has the spread of human rights discourse in online communities, particularly on popular SNS platforms like Facebook, impacted the way that queer communities discuss and advocate for their liberation?
3. Is it better for queer liberation movements to adopt an international standard for terminology based on mainstream human rights discourse, or should liberation movements instead adopt localized cultural language concerning gender and sexuality?

1.3 Purpose and Significance of the Project

The attempt by human rights organizations to universalize definitions on gender and sexual identity, as well as the terms and conditions of their protection, is hugely problematic, and perhaps even incompatible with the irretrievably heterogeneous ways that different cultures globally have conceptualized and enacted their own ideas about

gender and sexuality. However, it is possible that the widespread use of social networking platforms has led to greater communication, solidarity, and even widely accepted term usage in international communities. It is also possible that it has led to less diversity in these conversations, as human rights language becomes more mainstream and as communication is impacted by the way that information is curated and censored on these platforms. Thus, this topic is clearly a concern for both human rights theory and its interaction with multiculturalism.

More importantly, I think, is the significance of this project to its subjects. Through this research, I want to draw into question the usefulness and self-evident meaning of rights-based activism in queer communities. It is possible that an analysis of the way that this language is used (or not used!) in such communities will indicate ways in which human rights discourse must change or adapt in order to fit the needs of the rights-holders who utilize it; it might also be the case that we discover the ways in which queer activism is not necessarily compatible with human rights discourse, as has been suggested by some in the past (Waites, 2009; Wilson, 2009).

1.4 Scope and Limitations

Firstly, it is not feasible to research multiple SNS platforms for this thesis, although this would indeed provide a clearer picture of how human rights discourse has impacted internet-based communities at large. Not every place in the world uses Facebook, but it is perhaps the best-known SNS in much of the internet-using world, and is a platform used daily by millions of people. For the same reason, any attempt to analyze the website as a whole would be a monumental task. With these considerations in mind, I will limit my scope to a textual analysis of some publicly accessible pages and groups on the site. In my chapter detailing the research results, I will analyze trends I've identified through posts and comment sections, and then compare my findings.

Secondly, it is now well known that major SNSs like Facebook sell private user information to advertisers (among other groups), censor certain content according to a biased set of “community standards,” and even cooperate with federal and local organizations to monitor certain groups and individuals. Clearly, this has serious significance for the way that information pertaining to social justice movements and marginalized identities are managed online. However, for the scope of this thesis, to meaningfully and critically engage with the capitalist knowledge/power regime and how platforms such as Facebook operate as State apparatuses in the production/control of this knowledge is not possible; that would be yet another thesis all its own.

This third point is merely an extension of the second: that human rights are not merely a discursive concern on the internet, but an actively political concern for all internet-users. Human rights can be and frequently are abused in online spaces; there are no neutral grounds, and true anonymity is increasingly rare in an age where websites can easily extract or purchase your personal information. I will not be able to address this issue beyond a brief address.

Finally, since my research will be based mainly on observation of public spaces, there will naturally be questions about the reliability and representability of the groups and pages that I select, especially since this data will be collected online and only English-speaking groups and pages can be used. I don’t think there is any way to avoid this problem; however, I would also deny that the aim of this project is to produce data which “represents” or speaks for an entire marginalized group. Rather than using my data to make sociological claims, my goal is to create a space for marginalized people to speak for themselves and engage in meaningful dialogue on their own terms.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This research is organized into six chapters. In this first chapter, I introduce the context of my research topic and the questions that I intend to investigate with this

study. In the second chapter, I will review the salient literature and prevailing theories in this area of study, and describe places in which this literature in lacking. In the third chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework which I employ in my analysis. In the fourth chapter, I will describe the methodology that my research is structured through as well as justification for the methodological philosophy that I follow. In the fifth chapter, I will describe the results of my research in detail and conduct my critical discourse analysis on my findings. Finally, in the sixth chapter, I will summarize the results of this research, review my research questions and critically reflect on the conclusions that I draw from my data.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Here, I will explain the topics and fields of study which are most important to my research and describe their current status by drawing on their dominant or salient theories. I will do this by reflecting on key texts, authors, or groups of texts which draw on a relatively consistent set of normative theoretical assumptions. In this chapter I will also explore the content of these findings and include commentary on the status, possibilities and shortcomings of the literature. Finally, I will provide an introduction to the theoretical framework which underlies my project, and which shapes the data analysis of my research.

2.1 Human Rights Discourse on LGBT+ Rights

Currently, there is no “right to sexuality” as such which is protected under international human rights law. What exists is only the principles outlined in various non-binding human rights documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself states nothing explicitly about sexuality as a protected status, although there are many scholars who argue that sexuality can be read into the “other status” mentioned in Article 2, which demands the right to freedoms and protection “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (UN, 1948). The second Article of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) makes a virtually identical claim, providing the exact same list of protected statuses (UN, Article 2, 1976). However, it was not until 1994 that the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) decided in the landmark case of Toonen vs. Australia that the reference to “sex” in Article 2 of the ICCPR does in fact include sexual orientation. This resulted in many nations interpreting discrimination on the basis of sexuality as prohibited under adherence to this document. However, there are many who still consider this to be a flexible interpretation of the document rather than an indisputable claim. As such, many political leaders still reject the idea of sexuality as a protected status. Moreover, even

states which accept this claim interpret it in different ways. What does the 'right to sexuality' entail? What does gender-based discrimination look like in the transgender context? Moreover, beyond only 'anti-discrimination' practices, what are the positive obligations to gender and sexual minorities that human rights bodies advocate for? In order to examine discourse and practices concerning LGBT+ rights as human rights in the regime, it is therefore best to look to the most famous and widely referenced document on the subject: the Yogyakarta Principles.

The Yogyakarta Principles is a human rights document written specifically about sexual orientation and gender identity and was published after the meeting of various international human rights groups in Yogyakarta, India in 2007. The document was supplemented in 2017 and republished with updated definitions and an expanded list of principles. The stated primary goal of the document is to establish precepts and set the theoretical groundwork that will define practices concerning sexual and gender identity protections in international human rights law (Yogyakarta Principles, Introduction, 2007). Sexual orientation is defined in the preamble of the Yogyakarta Principles as referring to *"*each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender" (2007/2017); gender identity is defined as

> *…each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.* (Preamble, 2007/2017)

This is perhaps the most boldly inclusive document concerning transgender identity that exists in the human rights sphere today. It is well-established that "sex" is a protected status in virtually all human rights documents. However, it is an issue frequently equated to the struggle of cisgender women across the world, and most

documents dealing with discrimination based on “sex” are specifically concerned with equal treatment of cisgender women. And yet the question of what “sex” entails is increasingly prominent as movements for intersex, transgender and gender-nonconforming rights advocation blossom across the world. It is therefore worth noting that the Yogyakarta’s expansive definition of gender demands further elucidation on the Universal Declaration’s claim of “sex” as a protected status, since “sex” has been understood historically only in terms of the strict male/female binary—an understanding that is now both socially and scientifically outdated, considering the wide variety and significance of both chromosomal genetics and sex characteristics that fall outside of this binary (World Health Organization, 2010, pp. 1-2). According to the 2010 report on Gender and Genetics from the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1 in 2,000 children in the USA alone are born visibly intersex (with physical sex characteristics that do not match either binary gender assignment); the number of actual intersex children is therefore likely to be much higher, not only since there is no strict definition on the parameters of intersex characteristics, but also because many individuals do not find out they are intersex until receiving genetic testing later in life (WHO, 2010, p. 2). Indeed, there are many athletes who discover that they are intersex after receiving hormonal testing before competitions, which has resulted in conflict on whether, for example, a cisgender woman with a large amount of testosterone should be allowed to participate in women’s sports. Such an example demonstrates how our concept of binary sex is problematic and insufficient. Many intersex people also face discrimination or are subjected to nonconsensual sexual reassignment procedures as infants; practices that human rights organizations and intersex activists consider to be violent violations of the right to bodily autonomy. In order to protect intersex individuals and groups against such violence, it is necessary for human rights bodies to advocate exhaustively on their behalf, and to continually question the binary nature of biological sex.

That said, the question of sex is a serious concern not only for medical science, but also for sociopolitical structures which are explicitly designed to relegate people to

the “male” or “female” categories. Transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals face extreme discrimination in their daily lives and are subjected to rates of violence exponentially higher than other demographics. In November of 2019, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation released a report on the epidemic of anti-transgender violence stating that from January 1st to September 30th of 2019, 22 transgender and gender-nonconforming people were murdered in the United States (“A National Epidemic: Fatal Anti-Transgender Violence in the United States in 2019,” 2019). According to this report, 91% of these were Black transgender women, and 81% were under the age of 30, indicating the crucial point that such violence is compounded by other forms of discrimination—namely racial and socioeconomic. Another report, published on the Transgender Day of Remembrance (November 20th) in 2019, found that globally a total of 331 cases of trans murder were reported, with the majority of instances being reported from Brazil, Mexico, and the United States ("TMM Update Trans Day of Remembrance 2019," 2019). According to these statistics, the number of trans women subjected to violent assault or murder seems to increase each year, indicating an urgent need for human rights bodies to address the issue of gender discrimination both locally and globally.

However, direct violence is not the only—or even the greatest—challenge that such individuals face. Anti-trans discrimination is also deeply structural. For transgender and gender-nonconforming people, issues as basic as using a gendered public bathroom have become politicized to the scale of mass organization. In an interview with MSNBC, transgender actress and activist Laverne Cox made the grave observation that “When trans people can’t access public bathrooms we can’t go to school effectively, go to work effectively, access health-care facilities—it’s about us existing in public space” (2017). Such issues may seem trivial or hyper-focused on their surface, but they quickly become emblematic of society’s larger rejection of transgender and gender non-conforming identity. It is also important to note that this example is only in the context of the West; cultures all over the world have their own categories of gender and sex that also require examination and protection (internally, on their own terms). It is therefore

obvious that human rights scholarship on "sex" as a protected category requires much greater consideration than it is currently given, and cannot be defined only in terms of issues faced by Western nations.

2.2 Queer Theory and Human Rights Scholarship

Considering the growth of queer rights movements and the expanding consideration of gender and sexual identity categories in human rights documents, it is no surprise that scholarship on the interaction between queer theory and human rights theory also continues to grow and evolve. However, it should not be taken for granted that this interaction has had a positive impact on queer activism at large. Natalie Lovell (2015) is among several who ask the question of whether the political claims of queer liberation are possible through the framework of human rights. In her work, she explores the normative content of prevalent human rights literature on LGBT+ protections, and examines their relationship to the history and dominant claims of queer theory/liberation movements. Her explicit goal is to uncover the ways in which universalism in human rights, containing as it does normative/assimilative claims about sexuality and identity, are harmful to queer liberation movements. However, like many of her peers, Lovell ultimately concludes that a framework of rights which undergoes constant reexamination and reform is still the most rigorous foundation for liberation struggles. In Chapter 5, where I examine my findings for this project and perform analysis on the data, I go into more detail on the nature of this problem and discuss the discursive practices inherent to the human rights regime, and how they may be problematized by their intersection with queer liberation movements.

As stated earlier, this issue is only compounded by its diverse nature across different cultures. For example, Peter Jackson (2009) examines the recent phenomenon of queer identity categories proliferating in various cultures across the globe, claiming that there is a "globalisation of homosexual and transgender identities" in motion (Jackson, 2009). However, Jackson notes that while there are indeed transnational

similarities in the way these constructions are emerging, there are also many notable instances of divergence. Drawing on the example of the changing homosexual and transgender culture in Thailand, Jackson maintains that "local processes remain powerful forces for cultural transformation and are central to both new forms of sex cultural difference *and* the transnational convergences that are emerging in world sexual cultures" (2009). Jackson also draws on a number of different scholars to reject the popular belief that Western queer cultures have had overwhelming influence on non-Western cultures, particularly in Southeast Asia. Through the example of Thailand, Jackson argues that what cultural influence Euro-American queer cultures have had on Southeast Asia mostly operates through the adoption of certain terms (such as gay and lesbian) which denote quite different identity categories locally but are used as "a set of strategies that may produce different forms in different places" (2009). In other words, some cultures adopt the well-known Western terminology not to supplant or replace their own cultural categories, but as a political strategy in order to further their own liberation movements through the global community. After all, most NGOs and human rights bodies dedicated to queer liberation utilize Euro-American rhetoric in their strategies, so in order to gain support from these bodies, it makes sense for other groups to communicate using a shared terminology. However, it forces a confrontation with the assimilationist nature of some human rights bodies and their activism in foreign countries. It should not be taken for granted that this rhetoric is the best or only discourse surrounding gender and sexuality, or that we should formally adopt that language as the universal standard for all liberation movements globally.

2.3 Internet-Based Communication Theories / Connectivity Online

For the purposes of this project, it is important to reflect on the nature of internet culture and the unique features of online communication. For this reason, I have selected a number of salient theories concerning these topics and will attempt to relate their findings to the broader topic of online queer communities and how marginalized people discuss politics in these spaces.

Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effect (SIDE) by Reicher, Spears, & Postmes (1995) offers a critique of classic deindividuation theory, which is often used to explain virtual communities and online relationships, among other social settings. SIDE explains the effects of anonymity and identifiability on group behavior with reference to computer-mediated communication, suggesting that anonymity changes the relative salience of personal vs social identity and, contrary to prior belief, argues it can actually enhance sensitivity to local social norms. SIDE also suggests that in instances where social categories are especially meaningful/accessible to the group, making the individual more identifiable (through indication/visible features) strengthens rather than weakens social categorization. Further, this suggestion is enhanced by the strategic dimension of SIDE, which is concerned with the connection between identity expression and power, and proposes that social groups with less power (such as a marginalized identity group) often "use" anonymity as a way to express their identity and establish in-group norms. This theory is relevant to the project in that it demonstrates the ways in which in-group norms are contingent on the group's wider relationship to societal power structures. It also indicates the nuanced way in which groups with less power may use actually use anonymity to strengthen group social norms, rather than to limit the depth of their in-group relationships.

Similarly, Joseph Walther (1992, 2011) developed the widely used theory of SIPT (Social Information Processing Theory), which discusses how people get to know one another online without nonverbal cues, and how they develop and manage relationships in the computer-mediated environment. Walther also claims that as opposed to older theories which suggest that CMC (computer-mediated communication) is lacking in some of the essential features that humanized and familiarize FTF (face-to-face) encounters, CMC is now an essential component in many interpersonal relationships, and has its own richly meaningful range of cues, signals and behaviors. This theory strengthens my project's assertion that online communities are meaningful and have very real impact on their members, and further discredits the once mainstream concept

that social media is divorced from the "real world" both in terms of interpersonal relationships and social movements. Indeed, in today's social landscape, it seems to be the case that CMC and FTF encounters mutually reinforce each other and cannot easily be separated from one another.

Welbers and de Nooy (2014) further establish this idea by theorizing that internet forums are important sites of social influence, and that behavioral adaptation is essential to the bonding process. They use communication accommodation theory, linguistic style matching, and a statistical network model to examine the ways in which members of an internet forum engage in style-matching/adaptation behaviors in relationship to their online peers. Their research focuses on an internet forum for the Moroccan minority in the Netherlands, and they conclude that there is indeed a significant level of adaptation that happens on the level of the individual thread (posters will adapt to others in the same discussion) and on threads centered on similar topics (posters will echo or reinforce adaptations from previous conversations, leading to some consistency across related threads). This theory is relevant to this project's assertion that human rights language has become more mainstream in online queer communities because it has come to indicate shared values, and because members engage in style-matching in order to reinforce their place in the community.

The first important takeaway here is that much doubt has been cast on the validity of online relationships and communities, both in academic spheres and popular culture, but evidence suggests the opposite: online interactions can be deeply intimate, and feature a unique set of social norms, signals, and behaviors that are not necessarily found in FTF (face-to-face) encounters. Further, the proliferation and deep permeation of social media technology in our daily lives means that any serious sociological study must treat online interaction as a meaningful feature of social life. As stated before, in today's social landscape it is frequently impossible to divorce someone's online presence from their "real" interactions with society, not only interpersonally but professionally and in some cases, legally.

Secondly, this research has indicated that there is a great deal of adaptation that occurs in online communities where it concerns discursive terminology and style-matching. While this is true of any social community, this effect is perhaps accelerated online, where the language and behaviors one displays are more readily available to a wide audience, and words tend to persist over time (as in the case of forums and chat logs). This is clearly of special significance to marginalized social groups, especially those who are not identifiable on appearance alone, since members must already be well-versed in the practice of using style-matching (both verbally and in person) in order to identify each other.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the research at hand, these studies demonstrate that there is in fact a noticeable imbalance of power in online spaces that mirrors social inequalities in "the real world." While many have suggested that the internet serves as a neutral space where diverse individuals can interact on equal terms, the research seems to indicate that discursive spaces privilege those with normative identities who occupy powerful social positions. In my chapter discussing the theoretical framework of this research, I will go into greater detail about the problem of assumed neutrality and the reality of social inequality in digital space; for now, suffice to say that existing sociological research seems to bolster the suggestion that this problem is one of real significance to media and social studies alike.

2.4 Queer Presence / Community in Online Spaces

In their widely-renowned work, Richardson and Seidman (2002) outline a history of LGBT+ spaces online and discuss the ways queer people have used the internet to safely communicate their identities and form various relationships with each other (romantic, friendly, political, etc.). However, the scholars recognize that their historical research is lacking and incomplete due to the precarious nature of internet spaces, which often disappear completely over time or lose large amounts of data due to

platform and software updates (Richardson & Seidman, 2002, p. 118). Indeed, they describe the process of archiving internet history as characterized by "a disappearance of data" (p. 118). Nonetheless, they are able to trace a history which they describe as keeping "pace with mainstream internet services" despite the unique challenges LGBT+ people face online, such as opposition from online service providers (making it difficult for sites to remain online for long) and the real danger of being outed—they give the example of America Online [AOL] passing on private information that outed a US military member in the late 80s (p. 119). They also draw into question "the utopian rhetoric" of digital connectivity: "How far is the internet global if services can be blocked by one country? To what extent is the impression of anonymity undermined if service providers reveal private information to employers or other authorities?" (p. 119). This work raises a number of serious concerns for this project, as it reinforces my claim that the internet mirrors the power imbalances of physical public spaces, and even seems to align with the privileging of certain social, national and racial perspectives over others. It also demonstrates the problematic relationship that social media websites harbor with marginalized groups, which can be life-threatening in some cases, such as when a gay or transgender person is outed by the platform in a nation where it is illegal, or in a personal situation where their safety is contingent on others not knowing. Indeed, some social media platforms even maintain robust relationships with regional authorities which can manifest in problematic ways. Facebook, for example, demands that transgender people use their legal name rather than their chosen name in order to retain membership, which is alienating and discriminatory for those who are not able to legally transition for any number of reasons.

Similarly, Jonathan Alexander's essay on the construction and representation of queer identities online expresses the wide extent of linguistic and symbolic content that queer people use to signal others and to carve out explicitly queer spaces for themselves online ("Homo-Pages and Queer Sites," 2002). The aim of the essay is not only to survey such spaces and their representation, but also to speculate on the potential political and social ramifications of queer identify performance online. Notable, the study only examines a certain portion of queer-friendly websites available in the

USA; but Alexander expresses his belief that even “such [limited] surveying prompts critical reflection on the ways in which queers represent themselves—and each other—in an increasingly transnational communications medium” (p. 85). Many of Alexander’s observations are quite dated 18 years later—most of the websites referenced in his essay do not even exist anymore, and relevant sociopolitical imagery and language has shifted drastically since 2002. However, Alexander’s argument that queer people online use both symbolic imagery and repetition of familiar stories (of self-discovery, coming out, facing discrimination etc.) in order to show solidarity and form communities (p. 87) remains just as relevant today. Perhaps most importantly, Alexander observes that there is pressure from the online community for all gay and transgender people to perform their identities in socially acceptable ways; to be “affirmative role models” for “a community looking for its own story to be replicated again and again” (p. 90). In this manner, normative exclusion takes hold of ostensibly “accepting” spaces, and some identities fall even further to the margins. Alexander notes that “as some representations are put forward, others are left behind and critical silences are created—silences that reveal assumptions, values, and omissions that call for interrogation” (p. 98). Similarly, he describes “a distinct lack of class, racial, and ethnic diversity on these pages” (p. 101). While sentiments of solidarity and pathos are certainly ubiquitous in such spaces, this research suggests that even in the early days of online queer community, the intersection of marginalized identities (such as being a woman, or non-binary person, or simply non-white) rendered evident the social inequalities in these spaces. Since this study surveys only sites available in the USA, one can only imagine how such marginalization was and continues to be enhanced across boundaries of race, religion, and cultural identity on a global scale. The relevance of this study to my current work cannot be overstated, as it once more rejects the mainstream perception of the internet as a neutral space where internet access is all that is necessary to participate on equal footing with other group members. It also reinforces the idea that queer people use specific language, symbolism and iconography in order to strengthen their membership in the community and establish social norms, including the rhetoric used to talk about identity and political activism.

Mary L. Gray's (2009) groundbreaking ethnography on queer youth in the American rural South paints a similarly illuminating picture of the socio-digital landscape experienced by youth who were raised in the Internet Age. Gray argues that far more than through normative media representation, which tends to operate on the same urban, upper middle-class imaginary that dominates American television (think: *Friends, Sex and the City, Full House*, etc.), it is actually through community interaction—especially online, with similarly aged peers—that young queer people develop a meaningful grammar for their senses of identity and for the articulations of their non-normative desires. Gray discusses the enactment of queer "realness" for these young people, a term whose definition she draws from Judith/Jack Halberstam's 2005 work on transgender identities:

> …not exactly performance, not exactly an imitation; it is the way that people, minorities, excluded from the domain of the real, appropriate the real and its effects… the term realness offsets any implications of inauthenticity… realness actually describes less of an act of will and more of a desire to flaunt the unpredictability of social gendering. (Halberstam, as cited by Gray, 2009, p. 1163)

Gray utilizes this concept of queer realness to emphasize the way in which young LGBT+ people, especially those from rural areas, are forced to appropriate and rework categories of identity that are frequently disparaged in their daily lives (at home, or school, or in conservative news outlets) into aesthetic codes and behaviors that they can enact as a way to authentically perform their identities and self-truths. This may also account for the community-wide imperative towards inclusion of all identities, even those which are not as well-established as those in the traditional acronym (LGBT) or those which have ill-defined boundaries. In short, this ethnography demonstrates the nuanced way in which young queer people attempt to strike a balance between establishing a community with recognizable language and behaviors while leaving space for further expansions of how we understand gender and sexuality. It also

demonstrates the inherently political dimension of queer community building, since the establishment of any community is itself a rejection of mainstream ideas about gender and sexuality which are continually reinforced through media and in public spaces such as schools.

In terms of documentation on the sheer number of queer individuals online, GLSEN's 2013 "Out Online" is the first national report in the USA to describe the experiences of LGBT youth in online spaces. Based on national surveys of 5,680 students in 6-12th grade, GLSEN reports that "Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth experience nearly three times as much bullying and harassment online as non-LGBT youth, but also find greater peer support, access to health information and opportunities to be civically engaged" (GLSEN, 2013). The study further demonstrated that

> …a majority of LGBT youth reported having taken part in an online community that supports a cause or issue (77%), promoted a cause or issue (76%), written a blog or posted comments on another blog about a cause or issue (68%), and used the Internet to participate in or recruit people for an event or activity (51%) in the past year…. One in five LGBT youth (22%) said they had only been engaged civically online or via text message in the past year, suggesting that Internet technologies may serve as an important resource and foster civic participation for some LGBT youth. (GLSEN, 2013)

What we can deduce from this study is that online interactions are hugely significant to the social lives of queer youth in the United States today, and that online interactions are increasingly driving interest and action in sociopolitical issues among today's youth, especially those who are themselves in marginalized communities. While this is merely one study with limited applicability (as it only includes data on a limited age group in the United States), it is nonetheless possible to speculate how these findings can be relevant for other demographics, and how the queer youth culture portrayed here can persist as the surveyed group enters adulthood and find their

political and social footing. Indeed, today this survey is 9 years old, and many of its participants have been working members of society for many years.

To conclude, one obvious problem with this kind of scholarship is the assumption that there is a properly delineated queer or “LGBT+” community on a global scale. As previously discussed in Jackson’s work, the claim that all cultures share sexual and gender identity categories, and merely use different (but analogous) words to describe them, should be regarded as dubious at best. In fact, many scholars now argue that sexual and gender categories are largely contextual and do not necessarily translate from place to place. For example, Jackson’s research demonstrates that in instances where diverse cultures do adopt the LGBT+ acronym, it is mainly for political purposes rather than sincere identification with the terms, or alternatively, terms are adopted to mark new forms of sexual identity that are not necessarily analogous with their Western namesakes (p. 3, 2009). Other theorists have similarly argued that queer identity categories are not automatically the same in every culture despite the adoption of similar language or symbolism; for example, Jackson cites the work of B.D. Adam et al. (1999) in emphasizing this point: “[S]imilarities in activities, styles, symbols, institutions, language, and so on… do not imply the identities are the same… apparent commonalities must not blind us to differences that exist in the meanings of these practices” (Adams et al., 1999, cited in Jackson, p. 3, 2009). All of this research draws into question the assumptions that we have both about the globalization of queer identity and the “sources” of those globalizing elements, long assumed by many to originate in the West (and even more specifically the American political activism that defined queer theory in the 1980s and 90s).

This is a problem that plagues human rights activism and discourse across the board—not only in online spaces. Any effective human rights campaign which focuses on global LGBT+ activism must be able to localize the nature of their work at every stage, in every new location; not only from nation to nation, but often from region to region, or community to community in the case of tribal citizenship. However, this is rarely the case, as most human rights NGOs develop campaigns with the goal of broad

applicability, and their localization measures mostly include language translation and other minor adjustments. The deep complexity of gender and sexual identity categories across these cultures is difficult to trace and account for, as this would frequently require a complete reimagining of the campaign's content; in this way, even claiming that there is something which we can rightly call "global LGBT+ rights" is tenuous. The question of whether we should strive for such a totalizing concept is therefore one that this research treats with seriousness, as it is not immediately obvious that such action is useful or even meaningful for queer people across the world.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from these studies is that there is a unique relationship between queer community building online and politics, and that it is difficult to examine one without taking the other into consideration. Even in cases where communities do not have a specific political bent, it seems to be the case that they are nonetheless plagued by political concerns and must orient their activity around those concerns to some extent. The danger of being outed, being forced to use your legal name (often referred to as a "deadname" by the transgender community), or being pressured into using language that may be culturally irrelevant for you in order to participate in the community are all issues with political origins for queer people, and it is important that we remain cognizant of these issues in terms of politics as we examine these communities and their features.

All things considered, this area remains one that is vastly understudied, and what literature exists runs the risk of becoming outdated in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. Most sources cited for this portion of the project dated between the late 1990s and early 2000s—all of it over a decade (or in some cases even 20 years) out of date. It is thus my hope that this research will contribute to the developing body of work on the presence and interactions of LGBT people online.

2.5 Political and Social Discourse Online

Kushin and Kitchener (2009) offer a counterargument to the common critique that discussions on social networking sites such as Facebook are hostile to minority viewpoints and foster uncivil environments for political discourse. Their research demonstrates that the opposite may indeed be true: while there is some degree of uncivil discussion, the majority of discourse on serious political posts (about 75%) is devoid of “flaming” and other unproductive discursive behaviors. Of course, the political landscape has shifted since 2009, with many theorists noting a distinct movement towards more extreme political views accompanying participation in online spaces—specifically in ideologically homogenous spaces oriented around political movements (Wojcieszak, 2010).

Indeed, according to Wojcieszak’s research, it seems to be the case that people online generally seek out spaces (such as chatrooms and forums) where they will be exposed to views consonant with their own, rather than seeking out diversity in their discussion circles. This is especially true in groups that attract ideologues and extremists; Wojcieszak points to data from the Southern Poverty Law Center showing that “the number of online hate sites increased by more than 60% in the year 1999 alone” (p. 3), which is particularly notable when one considers that the late 1990s saw an unprecedented surge in internet access and activity. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the majority of the research cited here draws on data from English language websites, and therefore these conclusions may be more or less true in different parts of the world (and on non-English speaking platforms).

When it comes to political discourse online, there is also the problem of framing discourse in terms of “civility” and tolerance for all viewpoints, even those which are actively violent or hateful. When we talk about the value of discursive civility, we tend to downplay the material reality of political life for marginalized groups by framing conversations about rights and liberation as hypotheticals, ultimately subject to majority vote. We also tend to ignore how the social contract of tolerance is breached precisely

by those groups who cry the loudest about free speech and censorship; with this in mind, what sense is there in being "tolerant" of intolerance? This is a question that will be worth bearing in mind in discussions of how members of online communities interact with one another and what the social expectations are in these spaces.

Despite quite a lot of time spent searching, I was not able to find any scholarship on how queer people talk about politics in their online communities. What adjacent literature exists focuses solely on the personal experiences that LGBT+ people have navigating their identities through online relationships—nothing on the conversations about structural inequality and liberation politics that, in my experience, frequently do happen in queer spaces online. The closest that we get to this kind of research is in studies concerned with visibility politics—being seen and acknowledged by society for your queer identity—which, while important, is not the only or even the core political issue that queer people face. I believe this is strongly indicative of the need for research projects like mine. Queer people have a unique relationship to political life that demands careful attention, and which is distinct from that of other marginalized groups. And as previously stated, the rights of LGBT+ people in the global human rights project have been at best underdeveloped, and at worst actively rejected by many nations. For this reason, gaining a greater understanding of how queer people experience and conceptualize their political goals within the human rights framework (or outside of it) is crucial for moving forward with our ultimate goal of political liberation.

2.6 Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Communication Online

Georgie McClean (2011) explores the conditions for multicultural sociability, with specific attention to the facilitation of participation and recognition for diverse views in multicultural online forums. He concentrates on an analysis of online current affairs forums hosted by Australia's multicultural public service broadcaster, SBS. McClean concludes that these spaces are in fact important resources for multicultural societies, as they offer new spaces for participation and mutual recognition of views.

Bozkurt and Erdem (2018) similarly ask whether there is cultural diversity and diverse participation in online networked learning spaces in terms of cultural dimensions. Their research finds that while there is some amount of cultural diversity in these spaces, the majority of participation comes from "developed" Western cultures and countries in which English is either the native language or an official language. They conclude that the amount of diversity is significant, but there is a definitive trend towards cultural dominance in these online networked learning spaces.

One question that arises when we consider the intersection between global queer identity and multicultural interaction is what sort of cultural hierarchies emerge in these interactions. There is a distinct lack of research on this topic, and as such it is something I hope to shed light on in my analysis.

2.7 Why Social Media? Why Facebook?

The question remains of why, among all sites of political discourse online, SNS platforms like Facebook should be the focus of this project. One fairly straightforward answer is the wide reach and accessibility; platforms like Facebook and Whatsapp are some of the most frequently trafficked social websites in the world, and feature very few membership requirements. Facebook, Inc. was launched in 2004 by CEO Mark Zuckerberg and a small group of Harvard-based co-founders. It was first developed as a platform for Harvard students and alumni to keep in contact. While it was initially only available to Harvard students, it gradually broadened its user-base to other universities, and finally it became available to any global user above the age of 13 in late 2006.

For at least the past decade, Facebook has maintained its position as the most widely-used SNS in terms of global members and active usage (Statista, 2019). In 2012, Facebook surpassed one billion monthly active users, making it the first SNS to ever do so; as of the first quarter of 2019, Facebook boasts around 2.63 billion monthly

active users. In fact, as of April 2019, SimilarWeb statistics show that Facebook is the third most trafficked website on the web in general with approximately 20.61 billion non-unique visits per month (SimilarWeb, 2019). Statista also notes that as of October 2018, India, Indonesia and the United States rank as the top nations for Facebook users. In terms of sheer numbers, the largest demographic of daily Facebook users has consistently come from Asia and the Pacific region (Statista, 2019). This means that on a regular basis, the majority of people using Facebook are not native English speakers and do not come from Western nations, despite the overwhelmingly Westernized nature of the platform, and the content it advertises to users.

This combination of features makes Facebook the ideal site of research for this thesis project. While evidence suggests that Facebook heavily curates the content that its users see on their daily feeds (World Wide Web Foundation, 2018), it is still possible to locate and interact with any number of intercultural and international communities if one simply seeks them out. The only obvious barrier to this interaction is language, although research suggests that many young people become familiar with second languages such as English (Facebook's language of origin, as well as the global *lingua franca*) through regular use of the Internet's most widely trafficked social media sites (Barrot, 2021).

2.8 Where the Dominant Literature is Lacking

Despite the previous dominance of CMC theories which suggested that anonymity and lack of "nonverbal" (nonphysical) social cues are indicative of anti-normative and uninhibited behaviors, research today suggests that virtual communities and social spaces are increasingly normative and have their own unique range of social cues, etiquettes, behavioral norms, coded language and so on. Moreover, as platforms like Facebook force users to become more individuated and visible (often requiring you to use your real name/location), and online advertisers increasingly target individuals on a scale many consider unethical and invasive, anonymity itself is a shifting concept in

the digital world. However, there is little scholarship which examines the ways in which CMC behavioral trends affect online communities that are centered on social justice and the political discourse of human rights. While I don't intend to produce much by the way of broadly applicable sociological data, I think that my research (which examines the prevalence and use of certain language in these communities) will be useful to researchers who focus on sociolinguistic patterns in online spaces.

Secondly, and more importantly, there is a serious lack of scholarship concerning the use of human rights language in queer communities online. What exists mostly focuses on the marketability of human rights-based organizations/institutions and how they utilize this language to attract attention to their campaigns. Very little has been said about the informal use of this language online, and how it has affected the day-to-day conversations about social justice that often happen in online communities. For the same reason, there is little to no analysis of the way that culturally diverse queer communities online differ or converge with one another on the topic of human rights.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Here I introduce the concepts which are central to my work and the theoretical frameworks in which my research is rooted. I will also provide explanations for my choice to include these theories, and why I believe they are useful for this project. In doing so, I hope to shed light on my own philosophical and political positions, provide better insight into why this research is so important to me, and demonstrate its potential utility to the LGBT+ community.

3.1 The Post-Digital 'Public Sphere'

First, I think it is very important to reflect briefly on the concept of the "public sphere." What does this term mean in a post-digital era? Has the line between the private and the public been irretrievably lost in an era where SNS participation constitutes a major part of our daily social and professional interactions? And how is such interaction complicated by the legal and political interventions of the institutions that regulate the content we are allowed to share online? There are a few different perspectives on this question, but here I will outline the one which I find most compelling and relevant to the project.

In his 2016 work *The Internet Soapbox: Perspectives on a changing public sphere,* Terje Rasmussen describes the web as a growing political infrastructure and asks whether the term "public sphere" can be accurately applied to its function. He questions the dominant narrative wherein the internet is a neutral and democratic space where we as members of society further develop and disseminate our political ideas (Rasmussen, 2016, pp. 7-8). While drawing this idea into question, Rasmussen does point out that the shift in global conversations, once dominated by FTF encounters and the mass media, has created more "differentiated" spaces for discourse by decentralizing the spaces where these conversations occur, as well as through the sheer volume of participants from all areas of society and all cultures with technological

access across the world (p. 66). Ultimately, he argues that the digital public sphere is more differentiated now, that "public opinion… is more niche-oriented," and that there is a far greater diversity of voices, communication styles, and genres of content than before these platforms existed (p. 66). However, describing some of the existing literature on social media networks as "idealistic," Rasmussen notes that "A less idealistically informed network analysis may account for the concentration of capital, and the related interests in algorithmic surveillance and strict regimes of copyright," (p. 65). In this way, he draws attention to the fact that even in a public sphere which is more diverse because of digital connectivity, there are limitations to our communications online and there are sociopolitical mechanisms controlling, to some degree, what sort of interactions are possible on these platforms.

Rasmussen's work therefore highlights the unique and often discordant social landscape produced by SNS, in which we are simultaneously connected to a huge number of diverse people from across the world while also being subject to reproductions of the same social and political stratifications which occur in "real" world public spaces. He also notes that many restrictions on speech and behavior on digital platforms are motivated by their relationships to profit and national law. While in my introduction I admitted that the discussion of surveillance and algorithmic content curation constituted a separate research project entirely, I think it is important to briefly discuss it here in relation to the concept of publicness on social media. On today's social media platforms, 20 years on from the advent of widespread forum and chatroom usage, we are still debating general rules for online engagement apart from the terms of service established by individual websites. What sort of content is acceptable? What sort of language is acceptable? How far should the law of an individual country extend into the management of social media websites whose user-bases are broadly international? Can anything be considered truly private while we are navigating these conversations?

I believe that these questions are imminently relevant to all users of social media, and that the effects of this ongoing debate are evident everywhere. Setting aside the issues of law and surveillance, it is objectively the case that the type of language one can use on social media is heavily monitored, and what violates terms of service on a platform is usually decided by what will produce the least controversy for the parent company. This is also imminently relevant for marginalized communities whose presence on such sites is tightly controlled, and therefore its consideration is crucial for this project.

3.2 Intersectionality

For the sake of this research, I want to focus on intersectionality as it was theorized by Kimberle Crenshaw, and explore the way that this term has been utilized by modern social justice movements—especially in the queer community. She explains this concept in her seminal text on the topic, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), referring to intersectionality as the critical analysis of difference within and between identity groups. As a concept, intersectionality demonstrates that simply belonging to one group—for example, being a woman—does not mean that your experiences will be the same as all others in that group. At the time of writing *Mapping the Margins,* Crenshaw claimed that contemporary feminist and anti-racist movements had failed to contend with the reality of intersectional identities, often regulating experiences wholly to one identity group or the other, essentially rendering the experiences of women of color politically illegible—or, as she puts it, “to a location that resists telling” (pg. 1242). It is worth noting that *Mapping the Margins* focuses specifically on the experiences of women of color, who experience marginalization uniquely at the intersection between racism and sexism, and that Crenshaw’s framework explicitly follows the Black feminist movement. However, this concept has since been adopted as a critical lens for many other fields of social study and as a popular framework for social justice movements all over the world, and

its applicability to the socially complex experience of queer identity is well-established.

Indeed, intersectionality as a concept has become ubiquitous within social justice movements in recent years, and has been taken up as the ideological base of many liberation movements. It has also increasingly been adopted by human rights researchers and bodies as an organizing principle, and a critical response to the traditionally “single-axis” legal approach in human rights law, which focuses on “discrete, mutually exclusive grounds for discrimination” (Truscan & Bourke-Martignoni, pg. 103, 2016). Human rights scholars and social justice advocates alike adopt an intersectional approach in order to expose and address the complex mechanisms of discrimination and privilege that have historically hindered the work of international liberation movements which focus solely on individual axes of discrimination—for example, womanhood.

I believe this theory is relevant to the research because it asks us to reflect on the fact that different social groups have distinct needs and face unique challenges even on the intra-community level. It also reveals why it is necessary for us to be cognizant of how identity groups differ in experience across sociopolitical issues, and how identity-based politics emerge from that need. Queer identity is ever-evolving as social, cultural and legal norms shift, and the surrounding discourse is in a constant state of revision. To think of queer liberation in terms of only same-sex attraction or binary gender transition is no longer sufficient, either politically or philosophically. Additionally, in considering the vast diversity of queer identities globally, intersectionality demonstrates that there is no totalizing theory which can encapsulate all of its features, and that any examination of queer issues on a global or local scale demands more nuanced analysis.

One example of the importance of intersectionality in research on queer liberation and identity is the intersection of transphobia and misogyny, which is broadly

described as transmisogyny. Social justice movements focused on the liberation of women have historically excluded transgender women from both their social analysis and their activism; in the United States, the second-wave radical feminist movement even spawned a specifically exclusionary sub-movement known as trans-exclusionary radical feminism. Thus, in analyzing the misogynistic violence and discrimination aimed at transgender women, neither the analysis of transphobia nor misogyny alone are sufficient to make legible their experience of marginalization. It is necessary to look at both. Additionally, as was discussed in Chapter 1, impoverished trans women of color are subject to high levels of violence compared to other demographics in American society (Forestiere, *America's War on Black Trans Women,* 2020). Therefore, race and class are additionally essential considerations in any possible analysis of discrimination for these groups.

For this research and for academia more generally, intersectionality is crucial for examining the diverse experiences of queer people globally. The experiences of white queer individuals differ dramatically from those of non-white individuals; the experiences of queer women differ dramatically from those of queer men; the language that queer people in the non-Western world use is frequently not even translatable to Western cultures. The goal of global queer liberation through human rights is often underpinned by the presumption that queer liberation looks the same in every part of the world, with language differences being the primary barrier between movements. But the reality seems to be that queer liberation is only possible when it is addressed within regional and cultural contexts, and that no single human rights body is capable of wholly understanding, let alone developing the tools to deal with the marginalization of queer populations in every nation globally. For this reason, I believe that an intersectional analysis leads us towards the conclusion that liberation movements must be managed on a regional level, and that international human rights law, if it can be useful at all, must be flexible and adaptable in its applications across the world.

3.3 Connectivity

Here I want to discuss the concept of connectivity, specifically in reference to the global internet, the rise of social media and, through these things, the general state of online interactions today. To quote Deleuze and Guattari, I want to explore the ideas that have led me to the conclusion that “We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it... *We lack resistance to the present*” (What is philosophy?, pg. 108). Lacking resistance to the present, to me, describes the social media landscape as we experience it today: as an unbroken stream of news, opinions, controversies ranging from interpersonal to local to global, and an unspoken imperative to react to all of these things in real time and communicate our reactions to others. It raises the serious question of what communication *means* in these various contexts, and what broader implications it has for our social interactions online.

Additionally, a critical reading of Gilles Deleuze by Andrew Culp (2016) suggests that connectivity online is not necessarily a horizontal interaction between peers in neutral spaces, and thus our ideas of global connectivity through the internet need to shift towards a “darker” understanding of connection in an increasingly surveilled and homogenized digital landscape. He defines connectivity as “the growing integration of people and things through digital technology” (Culp, 2016, para. 8), and further, describes the state of connectivity as progress towards the disappearance of such technology—or in other words, a world where the internet and people become functionally inseparable from each other (para. 8). In this reading, Culp doesn’t necessarily critique Deleuze himself, acknowledging that the author has spoken about the dangers of connectivity becoming inextricably intwined with social contact and with power. Rather, he critiques what he perceives to be the standard reading of Deleuze, in which our connections to each other are categorically positive and even radical. There are various ways in which the current state of social media demonstrates negative connectivity, and I think it will be useful to ruminate on some examples here.

One way in which connection on the scale of social media can negatively manifest is in some instances of the phenomenon widely known as “cancellation.” A strict definition of cancel culture is difficult to provide, as it seems to encompass everything from criticizing public figures to calling out members of your local community based on bad behavior, no matter how distantly in the past that behavior took place. For the sake of this argument, we are excluding public figures here, and only talking about inter-community cancelation. The group mentality behind cancellation is complex and begs further study. While it is often a seemingly sincere effort to hold others accountable for bad behavior, it is just as often that community members engage in a concentrated effort to cancel others that they simply dislike. In all cases, the ostracization is postured as necessary for the safety of the group. The person being canceled is framed as “unsafe” due to their problematic behaviors, such as using bigoted language or expressing harmful viewpoints—but more importantly, “unsafe” seems here to be synonymous with “unsalvageable,” as the nature of cancelation is not only to draw attention to the behavior but to completely remove the person in question from the community.

This example is relevant because it reveals a tendency towards group surveillance in online spaces, some of which extends farther back into the past than the person in question has even participated in the group. It is not simply the case that people are canceled due to their present behavior—it actually seems to more often be the case that people are canceled due to things that they wrote on social media years in the past, often when they were younger or less informed. This issue is made more complex by the fact that marginalized groups who form collective spaces online tend to have stricter boundaries for membership, and are more likely to eject members who display bad behavior or who do not hold views which are normative in the group. Indeed, cancel culture seems to be the most prevalent in spaces that are the most oriented around social justice, and therefore the people most strongly impacted tend to be the most marginalized. Some level of scrutiny is certainly justified in these cases, but the tendency towards group surveillance forces us to ask where the line should be

drawn. Is it really the case that posts and comments on social media should be approached as indisputable evidence of a person's deeply held beliefs, even years after they are made?

Here, I think Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that we "have too much connection" is relevant. This level of unfettered connection allows and even encourages group members to police each other to a degree that is often hostile, and can inhibit members from authentic expression out of fear of not holding the correct viewpoint or using the correct language. Spaces in which mistakes are not allowed tend to not be conducive to challenging conversations about the nature and objectives of social justice movements. This is clearly relevant for online communities wherein the primary connection to each other is through marginalization, such as in LGBT+ spaces. Since it is not the case that all queer people uniformly believe the same things about rights or justice, the practice of "canceling" members for problematic behavior should at the very least be scrutinized, as well as the idea that our entire social media histories should be available to everyone at all times.

This theory is therefore relevant for the project because it asks us to reflect on the nature of connection and communication in digital spaces, and whether the level of connection we experience online—which can feel totalizing and inescapable to some—is necessarily a positive thing. We are frequently encouraged to understand the internet as a place where communication can happen unfettered by social strata like class, race, age, culture, and so on, but Culp's reading of Deleuze draws into question this notion, and is bolstered by the research cited in my literature review demonstrating how online communities are typically arranged by social hierarchies and dominated by those who hold normative values.

3.4 Subalternity / Decolonization

Postcolonial studies are broadly defined as studies which critically examine the sociocultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism—primarily Western imperialism—with focus placed on the ongoing exploitation of colonized nations and populations across the world. The theory holds that colonized peoples have a unique identity compared to other groups, and additionally that they are socially and culturally marginalized in specific ways. Not all scholars agree on the definition or utility of this term; some take issue with the idea that there is any "post" colonial society to speak of, as the project of settler-colonialism is still active in many parts of the world. For the sake of this project, I want to draw upon a few seminal works in the field of postcolonial study and their relevance to the specific topic of studying colonized cultures: Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (2008) and Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang's sister essays, "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (2012) and "R-Words: Refusing Research" (2014). For Spivak's essay, I will reference a previous work I've written on this topic.

In 1985, Gayatri Spivak changed the landscape of postcolonial studies with her monograph "Can the Subaltern Speak?", a work which examines the problematic ways in which Western academics investigate other cultures, particularly in the Global South. The essay focuses specifically on the topics of history, subjectivity, desire, the adoption of so-called universal frameworks to extract knowledge from other cultures, and the reproduction of Western geopolitical interests through academic practices (Ray, "Gayatri Spivak: Does the Subaltern Speak?", 2019, p.1). This work's goal is to uncover the ways in which Western academia as a whole is an extension of the broader Western colonial project, and that in "studying" the subaltern Subject, we are actually rendering them silent and reducing their knowledge into a form which can be easily translated and exploited. In other words, the purpose of research is not merely to uncover or examine knowledge, but to "produce" it in much the same way that a capitalist economy demands the production of labor—for a purpose that benefits the Western academy, rather than for its own merit ("Does the Subaltern Speak?", 1985/1988, pg. 272).

The concept of subalternity is relevant for this research project because it specifically draws into question the rights of Western academics to study other cultures. Similarly, this project questions the ability of the global human rights regime, which is centered on the United Nations as a governing body and on Western philosophy as an ideological base, to contend with the issues faced by queer populations in non-Western cultures across the world. Spivak's work reminds us that it is frequently not possible to fully "translate" the experiences or desires of other cultures into terms that are legible in our own, and that it is in fact a feature of the colonial project to desire that translation. In asking the question, "can the subaltern speak?" Spivak does not simply ask whether we have historically allowed marginalized, non-Western subjects to speak for themselves, but whether it is *possible* in the first place for them to do so; in other words, whether their speech can be made legibly and authentically without being re-routed through our own cultural expectations. For Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak because "in order to speak, to be heard, one must use the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer, and so meaning is always translated and transformed into something coherent with hegemonic language at the moment of speech" (Ray, 2019, p. 2). Spivak notes that this is especially the case for the subaltern woman: "Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced… If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (1985/1988, p. 287). Here she adopts a similar approach to Crenshaw, delving into the intersection of subalternity with other marginalized identities—and particularly with womanhood—in order to examine the ways in which some groups are driven even further from the possibility of speech through the manipulation of their agency (p. 283). However, it is important to note that Spivak differentiates from the intersectional approach here, raising the important point that in examination of the Other, sexual difference and racial discrimination are "irretrievably heterogenous," (p. 284) and as such cannot be analyzed as merely intersecting categories (Ray, 2019, p. 3). All the same, I would contend that this intersection of compounding marginalization also exists for queer people in colonized

nations, and their specific cultural truths and knowledge are rendered illegible in the Western academy through it.

Similarly to Spivak, Tuck and Yang (2012; 2014) provide a critique of qualitative research itself, discussing the de-territorialization of marginalized knowledge claims, and a refusal to code those who have been repeatedly Otherized and used as extraction sites for knowledge by Western academia. In their work “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” Tuck and Yang seek to remind their readers “what is unsettling” about decolonization, which is that it refers to the material work of ceding land back to Indigenous peoples and restoring their livelihoods—not the more abstract concepts of “decolonizing” society, public education or social justice organizations through the use of discourse (2012, pg. 1). They criticize this abstraction of the concept into a theoretical lens that can simply be applied to existing discourse, noting that “The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or ‘settler moves to innocence’, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (pg. 1). In other words, however well-intentioned decolonial discourse may be, it is ultimately incommensurable with the actual practice of decolonization, drawing as it does from the settler-colonial logic of Western social justice frameworks. Indeed, the authors argue that decolonization “is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based social justice projects, [and] is far too often subsumed into the directives of these projects, with no regard for how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice” (pg. 2). This follows the same logic that Spivak employs when she claims that race and sex are “irretrievably heterogenous,” and that examinations of those injustices therefore cannot employ the same methodologies and do not necessarily share the same aims. In short, what the “unsettling” of decolonization is precise and literal; it requires an unsettling of the settlers, an unsettling of the way of life and ways of thinking that have been produced by a colonial society.

In “Refusing Research,” Tuck and Yang note that “social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for

commodification," and from that acknowledgement, ask how we might "learn from and respect the wisdom and desires in the stories that we (over)hear, while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze" (2014, pg. 223). Admitting that it is necessary for researchers to analyze their subjects, Tuck and Yang suggest that we must then "refuse" research itself, and offer in their work means for practicing an art of "refusal," which they describe as "attempts to place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits, what is not up for grabs or discussion, what is sacred, and what can't be known" (pg. 225). In other words, they believe that researchers must cede the power of controlling knowledge to the participants of the research; they must not seek to define for the participants what it is they mean, or what is important, or what is necessary. They must allow the limits of knowledge to be placed by the participants, and through informed consent give them the right to rescind their consent at any time, for any reason. Additionally, through the art of refusal, we must seek to make visible what overstepped boundaries or seizures of control are already present in academia that we do not acknowledge.

These two decolonial works have been vital for me in the construction of my own theoretical framework, as they challenge and upset any academic desire to universalize or homogenize the irretrievably diverse experiences of queer people across different cultures. In my own work, I seek to emphasize this truth, and through it to question the notion that the international human rights regime can effectively address the injustices experienced by these diverse populations. Additionally, I want to take inspiration from the axioms put forth by Tuck and Yang in "Refusing Research," particularly that which states that "research may not be the intervention that is needed" (pg. 224). This theory is essential is essential for this project, as it demonstrates the need to draw into question the assumption that research is a necessary or useful tool for combatting injustice and inequality in Otherized cultures.

3.5 Homonationalism

I want to touch on another postcolonial work which specifically addresses the political dimension of queer identity in an international context. Despite its postcolonial location in theory, I have differentiated this concept from the previous section because of its specific reference points—namely, the biopolitical intersection of queer rights activism with Islamophobia and “pink-washing” political strategies. This concept deals with an oft untouched subject in international politics: the weaponization of “gay rights” in service of imperial expansion and war projects. I believe this concept will be useful for my research because it touches on the idea that creating a universalized and internationally acknowledged discourse around sexuality and gender can serve insidious purposes, and can have unintentionally negative effects on the larger project of queer liberation.

Jasbir Puar (2007, 2013) developed the conceptual framework of “homonationalism” to provide a foundation for understanding the complex ways in which national sovereignty is evaluated (as being righteous and capable) in relationship to its “acceptance” or “tolerance” towards gay and lesbian citizens. She describes her project as an exploration of the “folding of queer and other sexual national subjects into the biopolitical management of life… [and] the simultaneous folding out of life, out toward death, of queerly racialized ‘terrorist populations,’” (*Terrorist Assemblages*, 2007, pg. xii). She writes at length on the concept of biopolitics, which she draws from Foucault, who in his work “The History of Sexuality” describes it as the political function “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (1978, pg. 138). Moreover, Puar argues that the way this framework operates in international politics is to insidiously reproduce the conditions for Western imperialism/interventionism, and not necessarily to improve the living conditions of gay and lesbian citizens abroad.

The relevance of homonationalism to this project stems from its capacity to unveil the ways in which LGBT+ liberation movements centered on human right discourse can

act as vectors for colonial expansion, both in the ideological sense and in the legal sense of pressuring nations to adopt certain definitions of sexuality and gender. For example, scholar Deniz Akin's article "Queer Asylum Seekers," in which she describes a woman who obtained asylum in Norway on the grounds of being discriminated against for same-sex attraction eventually being deported when she enters into a relationship with a man, despite the fact that she would not be in any less danger in her home country than she was before (2016). Similarly, by associating certain countries and cultures with homophobia, we erase the existence of LGBT+ people within them and reduce their ability to seek help from outside sources without contextualizing their own gender and sexuality categories within the acceptable Westernized framework. Such a theory is thus necessary to my broader argument about the failure of the human rights regime to effectively conceptualize or protect diverse queer populations globally. It also asks the question of how useful it is for queer people abroad to establish strict legal and social definitions of sexuality and gender, as those definitions can be legally weaponized against the very people they are supposedly designed to protect.

3.6 Queer Theory

It will be useful for the sake of this work to address queer theory broadly, as it is a field which has had much influence on the way LGBT+ people talk about identity and liberation both in casual and in political settings. Queer theory became popularized in the 1990s by scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, among others. It is considered to have gained its philosophical foundation from the writings of Michel Foucault, who famously wrote in the 1970s on the idea that sexuality is socially constructed and that our language surrounding sexual identity emerged as a way of reinforcing existing power structures. Later on in this chapter, I will discuss Foucault's theory of discourse at length; for now, it will suffice to discuss the core tenets of queer theory as a field of work.

Queer theory takes inspiration from the fields of post-structuralism and deconstruction in its rejection of heteronormativity and the enforcement of strict gender and sexual roles. Its basic proposition is that sexuality and gender are fluid and often unstable experiences which extend far beyond the binary categories we are socialized to believe in: male/female, gay/straight, masculine/feminine, and so on. Like Foucault, queer theorists argue that gender and sexuality are socially constructed categories, rather than being purely “natural,” and assert that the binary model serves to reinforce political and social hierarchies which benefit the powerful and further subjugate the vulnerable. In general, queer theorists reject assimilatory practices in LGBT+ politics and are not satisfied with being subsumed into mainstream culture, i.e., through the legalization of gay marriage or through gender transitions which are allowed on the grounds of being binary (male/female). Rather, they want to entirely deconstruct the systems of power which enforce rigid categories of sexuality and gender, and create social norms where the freedom to experience one’s identity fluidly is encouraged.

Queer theory is meaningful for this research in a variety of ways. Not only does it provide greater insight into the language used in many queer communities, but it provides a philosophical foundation for many of the problems examined by this project, such as where our ideas about sexuality and gender emerge from and which sociopolitical voices are prioritized in conversations about queer liberation. It asks us to critically reflect our preexisting ideas about identity, and ask how those concepts might be expanded to make space for those who fall outside the normative boundaries of LGBT+ discourse. The ideas proposed by queer theory will therefore also prove very useful in the critical discourse analysis I have chosen to employ for this study.

3.7 Theories of Data Collection and Analysis

3.7A Discourse

For the purposes of this project, I am choosing to follow Michel Foucault's theory of discourse. I believe this theory falls in line with my chosen analytical methodology, critical discourse analysis, which will be addressed in the latter half of this section. I will also be drawing on arguments made in one of my previous works on the topic. The best description of this theory comes from "The Order of Discourse," a transcription of a lecture given in 1970 at the College de France. In the lecture, Foucault examines discourse through both a historical lens and an understanding of power as inextricably linked to knowledge (a concept he would later coin under the neologism "power-knowledge"). He suggests we view discourse as a material reality: not only as conceptual, but also as written, literally uttered, and animating every form of communication we partake in. In discussing the sociopolitical organization of discourse, Foucault claims "that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality" (p. 52). In other words, systematic attempts to control discourse represent a primal fear and rejection of what we might come to know, and how knowledge can upset the systems in place. For this reason, it seems particularly useful to apply this theory of discourse to the field of human rights—a tradition which is, at its core, dominated by the impulse to universalize diverse experiences ("Michel Foucault: The Order of Discourse," Ray, 2019, p. 1). In this field, the question of the universal is also fundamentally a question of authority, of who should be allowed to speak for entire groups or even the entire world, and the vulnerable among us most of all. As such, we might ask how a historically contingent understanding of power and knowledge troubles the universalist leanings of human rights theory, and what this might mean for marginalized groups like the LGBT+ community (Ray, 2019, p. 1).

Importantly, Foucault understands power and knowledge as historically contingent, inextricable and mutually-reproducing—power being produced through the accumulation of knowledge, and correspondingly, knowledge being produced and framed in compliance with the demands of power. He also argues due to the constraints of power, that are restrictions not only on what can be said, and where it may be said, but also on who has the authority to say it. In human rights theory, such authority is always in contention (Ray, 2019, p. 2). When the United Nations was formed, it was the Allied Powers who decided what should be considered human rights and who should have the power to enforce them (namely, select nations and the institutes they formed to regulate international policies). Non-governmental organizations and political movements wishing to invoke the authority of human rights have historically had to act in deference to the UN. However, as post-structural and post-colonial thinking has become widespread, many organizations and activist groups have questioned this discursive authority and criticized the regime of privileging Western sociopolitical values and viewing them as uniquely "progressive" (Ray, 2019, p. 3).

Indeed, Foucault notes that it is possible to "speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority" (p. 59). Things that were once considered to be outside a discourse because they did not obey the methods and propositions of that discipline enter by disrupting its fundamental assumptions, and shifting the boundaries to include them. Institutes and scholars are frequently reluctant to recognize these disruptions as valid, as the various procedures of exclusion and knowledge hierarchies reveal, because they have the potential to fundamentally redefine or terminate a discourse entirely. More often than not this is an unconscious effort, but in human rights theory it is frequently made into an active system of procedures which discourage questions about cultural relativity and antagonistic values (Ray, 2019, p. 6). This effort is framed as protective of human rights as a value system, since the rejection of universality and normative morality as its primary discursive assertions threatens to disenfranchise the entire international project. But perhaps, as with other discourses, "we should not be so afraid of this breakage; perhaps it will lead us to new avenues of possibility for thinking about human dignity,

multicultural societies and the meeting of seemingly irreconcilable differences in the world" (Ray, 2019, p. 6).

3.7B Critical Discourse Analysis

For this research project, I have chosen to employ critical discourse analysis as my organizing analytical framework. While normally this section would be placed in the methodology chapter, I have chosen to include it here because the practice is, by its very nature, a theoretical position rather than merely a set of analytical steps. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the field of discourse analysis which focuses on power relations and inequality in language usage. Pioneered by scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Robert Hodge, and Ruth Wodak in the 1980s-1990s, and inspired by post-structuralist thought, CDA is a linguistic theory which argues that social and linguistic practices are fundamentally intertwined, constituting and reinforcing each other. Much in the same vein as Foucault, these scholars believe that language is fundamentally social and that it is unconsciously constructed to reinforce certain social and political ideas. In this way, societal norms, power relations and structures of inequality are produced and reproduced not only through social action, but also through language. For this reason, critical discourse analysis seeks to investigate the ideological nature of language in order to highlight instances of asymmetrical power, exploitation, marginalization, and other structural inequalities in all aspects of society: media, education, social infrastructure, politics, etc. Unlike other theories which seek to be objective, CDA is described by some as being explicitly political, and its interpretive power is usually colored to some degree by a researcher's own sociopolitical motivations.

CDA is not a homogenous practice, and while there is much overlap in practice, there are four distinct different versions of the theory that are generally recognized as its mainstream branches (Nyugen, 2014). These include the critical linguistic approach, pioneered by scholars such as Hodge and Kress; the sociocultural approach, best

known in the work of Fairclough; the historical-discourse approach established by Wodak; and the socio-cognitive approach, first developed by Teun A. van Dijk (Nyugen, 2014, p. 1). Each tradition offers something different in terms of analytical methodology, but they also share some core features, mainly in the philosophy that language is social, contextualized historically, and necessary for the reproduction of certain power structures in society, and that therefore texts “acquire their meaning by the dialectical relationship between discourse and the recipients who have different interpretations” (Nyugen, 2014, p. 2).

I have chosen this method because it responds well with my research questions, as this research seeks to ask not only “how do queer people use human rights language” but also “how has human rights language created *change* in these discursive spaces”? This second question is one that naturally begets answers with sociopolitical overtones. A significant feature of critical discourse analysis is not only familiarizing oneself with the “texts” at hand, but with the structures of power that recursively maintain the dominant discourse, and the history behind it. For example, in my literature review, I discussed at length the issues with queer liberation through the wider human rights legal regime, and the failure of human rights bodies to acknowledge sexual and gender minorities in their most salient texts (such as the UDHR). In my analysis, I will discuss how the rhetoric employed by human rights bodies has impacted discourse in queer online communities, and the wider sociopolitical implications of this interaction.

There are also critiques of CDA which it will be useful to address here, as well as some specific concerns for this research project. In their 2014 manuscript “Critiques of Critical Discourse Analysis,” H.K. Nguyen outlines some of the existing critiques of this theory. These include the claims that CDA is heterogenous in practice and difficult to describe as a unified theory; that its interpretative power is highly subjective and may be distorted by the personal beliefs of the researcher; that researchers may select texts based on their own preconceptions, rather than what is necessarily salient in the field; that it is unsystematic and acts on “vague” analytical models; and that it maintains a

"superficial treatment of context" (pp. 3-5). Ultimately, what most of these criticisms seem to amount to is a rejection of an analytical model which accepts as necessary the subjectivity and bias of the researcher.

For my own criticism of this theory, I wish to reduce or eliminate the amount of pure coding that occurs in CDA. Coding is the practice of collecting data based on certain criteria—terms that come up frequently, for example—and utilizing a program or quantitative analytical method to determine how these specific codes function in discourse. Since CDA, as opposed to traditional discourse analysis, is primarily interpretative and motivated rather than purely explanatory, it is perhaps less oriented towards coding than its predecessor. However, that is not to say that it is exempt. Returning to Tuck and Yang's "refusal as an analytic practice that addresses forms of inquiry as invasion" ("Unbecoming Claims," 2014), rather than coding, I want to decode—especially as it relates to the non-Western cultures I engage with in my research. I am interested in research that de-territorializes personal experience and produces authentic, uninhibited expressions of self-identification. I also want to center what my research subjects see as important or relevant, rather than my own preconceptions about what kind of answers are most useful. Perhaps most importantly, I want to generally organize my method of data collection around Tuck and Yang's art of refusal—that is, the refusal to engage with the "code beneath the code" that is settler-colonialism, adherence to unexamined power relations, and violent knowledge production for the academy at the expense of objectifying others.

This goal is perhaps, in some way, at odds with the very concept of non-participant observation. It is necessary for one to do interpretative work when dealing primarily with texts, since there is no one to respond directly to the question of what their rhetoric means to them and how their understanding compares to that of others who use the same kind of language. However, even in interpretative work, I think that it is a useful effort to remain conscious of decoding as the ideal of qualitative research and to

constantly question one's own preconceptions and political motivations when conducting such research.

This goal has also been problematized by my failure over the course of this project to attract participants for what was intended to be a semi-structured interview component. I discuss this at length in Chapter 5, so here it will suffice to say that due to poorly executed recruitment efforts, this component of my research was not achieved and as such the level of decoding that I aimed for was not strictly possible. Without interviewing, a significant level of interpretation and biased data selection is unavoidable. However, I hope to alleviate this failure to some degree by focusing my research on communities which strongly feature the voices of the most marginalized among us in the LGBT+ community. I also hope that studies in the future—whether conducted by others or by myself—succeed in designing similar studies that actively centers the voices and concerns of those most affected by giving them uninhibited space to speak.

Methodology

4.1 Research Methods

This research employs critical discourse analysis to examine Facebook pages and groups whose express purpose is queer community. The original intention of this project was to pair discourse analysis with semi-structured individual interviews, but over the course of my work it became clear that these interviews would not be possible. In Chapter 5, where I discuss my findings, I go into great depth on the nature of this failure to obtain interviews and what it means for my project more broadly.

4.2 How the Research is Being Conducted

After selecting groups/pages and collecting the necessary data, analysis will be concentrated on all posts referencing human rights which were published to those selected public groups/pages on Facebook over the course of 2019. I will analyze not only the posts themselves, but the comment threads attached to them. For the sake of privacy and to maintain as much anonymity as is possible, I have not included any information which directly identifies these pages or any of their contributors. Such information can be accessed by other researchers on request. I used the search function on Facebook as a means to locate these posts.

In terms of the data which is needed to answer the research questions: for the critical discourse analysis, I am looking for instances of human rights being discussed both casually and in relation to queer liberation, whether that is in terms of social acceptance or the pursuit of greater legal rights. Since human rights and “rights” as a broader concept are often interchangeable in conversation, I am including posts that speak simply of “rights” as long as it is clear they are referencing rights attributed to personhood rather than national rights established by a particular nation’s legal documents.

4.3 How the Data Was Collected / Data Management

Data was collected through screenshots of the analyzed posts and comment sections from the public pages and groups. I anonymized this data by immediately scrubbing all screenshots of potentially identifying information, including names, pictures and all mention of specific personal data in comments (age, names, locations, group titles, etc.). All data is encrypted and stored on an external flash drive with password protection, and no data has been transferred from this flash drive onto any other device. As is required by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee, all data which is potentially sensitive or could not be fully anonymized will be deleted at a fixed date after this research project is completed.

4.4 Techniques for Analyzing Data

In my chapter on theoretical frameworks, I wrote about my choice to use critical discourse analysis as a method for analyzing my findings. I also discussed my reservations with coding, and described the alternative theory proposed by Tuck and Yang for performing research without overwriting the perspectives of research subjects with my own biases and interpretations. Here, I will reflect more specifically on the techniques that I employed to conduct this analysis and how it relates to my research questions more broadly.

In order to coherently describe the steps I am taking, here I will list out the central questions of my analysis. Since my research primarily concerns casual conversations that happen at the level of particular Facebook communities, note that I will firstly attempt to analyze data on this scale before attempting to connect my findings to the broader conversation of how human rights language is used in queer liberation discourse. The questions that I have laid out for this analysis are as follows:

1.) Examine the terms and concepts that emerge over and over again in the discourse. What is treated as normative or self-evident?
2.) Examine the power differentials at work in the discourse: who is given power? Who is denied power? What does this look like in practice?
3.) How does the discourse reflect and (re)produce ideology, the conditions of power and social hierarchy? What concepts are being constituted and reinforced by the language we use?
4.) How has this discourse has been impacted by human rights ideology, and what implications does it have for the continued relationship between queer liberation politics and the human rights regime?

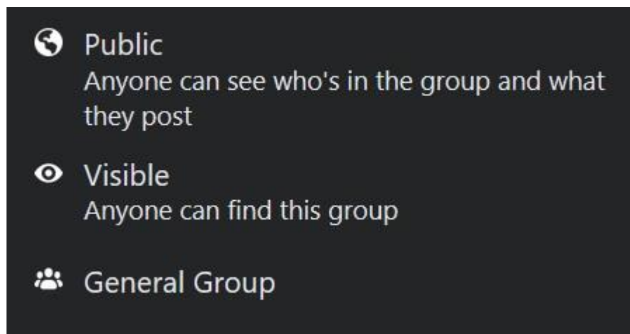
4.5 Ethical Considerations

According to the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee, internet research should not be distinguished from other forms of research; rather, established norms and values should be adapted to this format (NESH, 2019). Similarly, researchers at the American Journal of Bioethics argue that “social media is, and will increasingly become, an important tool in the recruitment arsenal, and therefore calls for ethical and regulatory guidance that can facilitate the appropriate implementation of social media recruitment techniques” (Gelinas, L., et al, 2017). These are only two of many ethics committees and research ethics scholars who have recognized the necessity of viewing the internet, and social media platforms in particular, as serious sites of social and political interaction. This recognition carries with it the implication that academic researchers must take the internet into account in their attempt to understand how sociopolitical discourses, trends, and conflicts are developing over time. However, this is an area of research ethics that is still relatively new, and it must continue to change and adapt as social technologies evolve—which they have done at a rapid pace for the past two decades. For this reason, I find it necessary to dedicate significant space in this chapter to demonstrate how my research fits into the larger discourse of online research ethics, and how such research is defensible under the ethical

framework that I abide by. I have divided this discussion into five sections: I. informed consent, II. potential harm to participants / invasion of privacy, III. the vulnerability of certain groups online, and IV. an argument for why such research is useful to the subjects of this study.

I. Informed consent

Since my research focuses on critical discourse analysis and therefore strongly features an observational component, it is necessary to describe the ethical rationale supporting such work. The first and most important component of this rationale is the decision to exclusively use information which is completely public and open access; that is to say, anyone who is participating in these posts can be reasonably expected to understand that their engagement is public. For example, in any given Facebook group, it will be openly listed as Public, Private or Closed. Similarly, the “About” section for the group will clearly describe its specific level of privacy for members:



For the purposes of this research, I will only use posts and comments from groups which are listed this way (completely public, and openly accessible to all users on the website; not only group members). I believe that this set of standards places the subjects of my observational research firmly in the camp of those who should be reasonably expected to understand that their engagement is public.

II. Potential harm to participants, including the invasion of privacy

The most obvious way in which participants can be harmed by this research is through external identification—i.e., individuals not involved with the research tracking down people whose comments have been utilized in the non-participant observation portion of this research. As stated before, I have taken various measures to ensure that there is a very low likelihood of this occurring, including: 1. anonymization measures that protect personal data, 2. encrypted platforms for storing data, 3. a data plan that ensures any personal information gathered is not stored for more than 6 months beyond the duration of the research project, and 4. the refusal to record or use any public comments from the non-participant observation that could be used to personally identify individual subjects.

Given that a majority of this research takes place in an online public setting, it is impossible to guarantee with total certainty that some individual comments cannot be identified, most likely by other users who frequent the pages in question. It is for this reason that I have chosen to only use pages and comments which are understood by users to be publicly available—no private groups of any kind. Reflecting on the ethical implications of this decision, I think it is necessary to discuss the perceived seriousness of social interactions online. In an era where social networking platforms account for a significant portion of public discourse and social interaction, most users now accept that their behavior online can and often does have a significant impact on their “real” lives; in the United States, for example, we regularly see instances of individuals who have lost their jobs or platforms due to poor behavior online, such as by using derogatory terms in comments sections, posts, or in videos (Lam, 2016). It is also now commonly written into job contracts that your employer has the right to review your public social media profiles for any posts or interactions that might reflect poorly on the company’s image. Whether or not we believe these consequences are just—and certainly there are many who do not—they are indisputably a feature of the society we live in today (Thompson et al, 2020; Jeske & Shultz, 2016; McDonald & Thompson. 2016). Because of this, I

believe most users operate under the reasonable assumption that our behavior online is held to much the same standards as our behavior in physical public spaces, and we are just as likely to be held accountable for sentiments we share in public spaces online.

III. The unique vulnerability of queer individuals online

I have discussed the unique vulnerability of queer individuals in online spaces repeatedly throughout this project, as it is one of core considerations of the research as a whole. For the sake of avoiding repetition, here I will simply outline the major features of this vulnerability as it applies to data security and ethical research.

1.) Queer people are uniquely vulnerable to the threat of doxxing and having their personal information shared with unwanted parties. In much of the world, homosexuality and gender transition are still criminalized; in many others, while legalized, they are still culturally and socially ostracized to a large extent. The leaking of data such as names, locations and personal identifiers can be a life-or-death situation for many queer individuals.

2.) Because of this unique vulnerability, queer people are also frequently explicitly targeted by groups or individuals who seek to “doxx” others online; doxxing being the act of obtaining sensitive personal information about an individual who intends to remain anonymous and exposing their identity. Sometimes this is done for the sake of obtaining blackmail, and sometimes in service of a group ideology (such as conservative religious extremism), among a variety of other reasons (Anderson, B. and Wood, M.A., 2021). Doxxing has become increasingly common in the modern internet era, and it is not at all unimaginable for such individuals to infiltrate spaces online meant as safe spaces for queer people with the intent of collecting personal data on them.

IV. Why this research is useful to the group that it pertains to:

In the chapters of this research concerning results and conclusions, I attempt to actively demonstrate how this research can be meaningful and useful for the minority group it pertains to, and particularly to those at complex intersections of discrimination and who are most marginalized among us. But here I will briefly outline the main points that constitute that argument.

1.) Critical discourse analysis without coding. In a rejection of coding, we reject the "code beneath the code," which is objectification, settler-colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and the pursuit of violent knowledge production. When analyzing without coding, we allow the subjects of the research to articulate their knowledge authentically, and to use the research as a loudspeaker for that knowledge without it being filtered through the analytical biases of the researcher.
2.) Critical reflection on the viability of the human rights framework, which is globally popular among activists, and which is frequently leaned on as the primary framework of liberation politics. For marginalized groups such as queer people, it is crucial that we regularly interrogate our liberationist frameworks and methods in order to make sure they are still serving the groups in question.
3.) Critical reflection on the state of online political and social justice-oriented discourse, especially as it concerns queer communities. There is a need to start treating these spaces as more serious sites of discourse and community, rather than flippantly as social spaces which have no impact on "the real world."

4.6 The Quality of the Research

It is perhaps obvious to point out that the "objectivity" of this research is impacted by my personal engagement with the subject matter. However, in keeping with my previous stance on the refusal to "code" the lived experiences of other people, I similarly

refuse to pretend that research is ever conducted in a vacuum of political and social objectivity. I believe that my personal insight and deep involvement with my topic is an asset, rather than an obstacle, to the quality of this research. Moreover, I believe it is not the place of researchers who have no connection to certain groups to study those groups, acting merely as neutral observers for the academy. As what one might call an "insider," it is because I want to advocate for and improve the political status of my community that I conduct this research. Such a stance necessitates a lack of objectivity, and an obvious bias towards emancipatory justice politics for this group. However, it is also not responsible to pretend that my unique experiences as an LGBT+ person allow me to speak for others in the community, and particularly not those whose identities are subject to greater discrimination, such as those who are non-white and non-Western. It is for this reason that I chose to focus my data collection and analysis as much as was possible on members of the community who do not occupy positions in majority power groups, and to center their perspectives to the best of my ability.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Interview Respondents

Having finished the data collection, it is important to discuss the changes that this project went through over the course of my research. This project was originally oriented around an interview-based methodology, but as time stretched on, I found I was unable to find any willing correspondents. That raises the obvious question: Why were there no respondents? Are marginalized groups, in particular, less likely to respond to interview requests which ask them (however anonymously) to disclose personal information about their identities? Or was this a failure of strategy?

Of course, one eminently relevant factor is that this research took place over the course of two years (2019-2021) during which much of the world was locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lives of most people globally were to some extent upended during this time, and this likely made my efforts to contact potential respondents even more difficult. I am likely only one of many researchers whose work was compromised by world events, and therefore I feel it is necessary to address this situation in reference to my project. However, world events surely cannot account for the totality of my failure to attract respondents, and other factors must be considered. For this reason, I dedicated some of the time that would have been devoted to interview data analysis towards readings on why researchers struggle to attract and retain the participation of marginalized groups in academic projects (Brayda, W. C., & Boyce, T. D., 2014; Moree, D., 2018; Montesanti et al., 2017). I also want to devote some consideration to the specific type of interviews I attempted to conduct for this paper, and why I believe I failed.

My interview methodology involved contacting respondents digitally and giving them the option of participating through either verbal (video-based) or text-based communication. Because this method was wholly digital, and because it was meant to

attract respondents specifically from Facebook, my method involved posting the link to a document thoroughly explaining the project, the types of respondents I was looking for, and some secure methods of contacting me that maintained the anonymity of those interested. However, I found it difficult to target this specific audience without first contacting groups which were oriented around queer identity, and it was here that I ran into my primary roadblock. None of the moderators of these groups were inclined to let me post about my project in them; some stated that the purpose of their group was for community or for levity (sharing in-group jokes and lighthearted commiseration) and were not interested in exposing members to serious content. Some treated me suspiciously as an outsider, since I had never posted in their group under normal circumstances, and implied that I would be taking advantage of community members by promoting my project there. Others simply did not respond to my inquiries at all.

Failing thus to make trusting contact with specific private groups, I was forced to post about my project directly on my personal page, asking friends and professional acquaintances to share the document as widely as possible in the hopes I would receive interest via my encrypted email. This effort also failed, and leads me to wonder whether being asked to contact me over a third-party platform, rather than discussing participation through our shared and well-established social media platform (Facebook) discouraged potential respondents from reaching out. I believe it is possible that this action alienated respondents by making the project feel serious and unwelcoming to those who might've been curious about participation, but felt that making an account with an encrypted email service was too demanding before having ever spoken to me as a researcher.

I was also left wondering whether the nature of the project as a whole came across as coldly academic to those who were essentially being asked to discuss their private lives in relation to a global political project with a total stranger. The interview process was described in my document as taking anywhere from half an hour to an hour, and in retrospect the orientation of the questionnaire was too academically

focused, perhaps even incongruous with my stated desire to speak to people who participated in queer online communities on a more casual scale. I can only imagine how this might've alienated those who perhaps felt an interest towards the topic but perhaps also felt underqualified to discuss it, which is precisely the opposite of what I was searching for, and as such I feel I did not create a schematic that was sufficiently welcoming to potential participants.

Finally, there was the issue of language and cultural barriers. Although my stated purpose was to focus on respondents who were not from majority power groups, I do not believe I went to the necessary lengths to make my project known or accessible to the audience which would've best fit that description. Due to my own language limitations, it was necessary to complete the interviews in English, and I described my project in rhetoric that would've been most familiar to a Western audience. It seems, then, that my document likely was not designed to reach those I specifically wanted to reach, and was not presented in a manner they would've found compelling. Despite considering myself an active member of the wider queer community, I realize now that my position as a white, Western lesbian from the United States did not grant me any specific insight into the struggles of non-white and non-Western queer people globally, or prepare me with any unique toolset to garner their interest in my project. I consider this failure to be representative of the struggle to decolonize our work as Western academics; though I read quite a lot of theory on this topic, theory on its own was not enough for me to break down the barriers of accessibility in academia and create an appealing project to those who might've benefited from it the most. Hopefully this failure will allow me to reflect seriously on my position as a researcher and academic, and do better to be inclusive in the future.

Ultimately, however, this is speculation. Without knowing who might've seen my posts or why they decided not to participate, it is impossible for me to construct a meaningful narrative about what went wrong with this research methodology, or if things might've gone differently under different circumstances. I think that the takeaway from

this experience I find most important is simply that as researchers attempting to work with marginalized communities, even if we consider ourselves members of such groups, we must remember that academia at large is regarded as inaccessible by many.

5.2 Findings

Due to the nature of this project, the majority of data collected during my research was preserved in the form of screenshots. While referencing specific posts and comments during my analysis, I believe that rather than filling this section with images, it is best to instead compile them in an appendix that readers can view and reference as they move through the chapter. It is also worth noting that not every post I analyzed will be included in this appendix—only those which are directly referenced, or which serve as specific examples of points being made. Any fellow researchers who wish to see the entirety of this data collection can contact me with their request, with the knowledge that any sensitive or identifying information will not be made available to them.

5.3 General Trends

5.3A Do queer people discuss human rights in public spaces on Facebook?

During my research, I found that nearly all the pages and groups I examined featured political content to a large degree. Many focused on providing resources for queer people in their locality, discussing news related to discriminatory laws or practices, or were intended as supportive spaces for those who are closeted or who are living in unsafe environments. Some focused on local queer-centered events and discussed which local venues were safe. Despite initially hoping to focus on communities that were more casual than political in nature, I found this not to be possible, as it became clear that political and social activism constitute a significant portion of queer community-building online.

Additionally, I discovered that while many conversations centered on human rights happen in these communities, the ones that have the most depth are those that occur in groups. Rather than privacy, it seems the driver for this trend is a sense of community; discourse in totally public spaces (for example, the comments section on a public page) tends to be sparse and disjointed. Pages also tended to be populated more with LGBT+ allies and detractors than actual queer people, demonstrated by comments expressing allyship or rejection, portraying a more diverse audience base from which in-group conversations were less likely to occur (see Appendix, Section 2, p. 6). It also generally seems to be the case that more intimate communities foster better discussions on these topics, perhaps because of the trust that is built between individual members, or their increased willingness to be charitable to those who they view as fellow members of their community, as opposed to strangers who are simply concerned with winning an argument (see Appendix, Section 1, p. 1). Overall, it does seem to be the case that queer people discuss human rights in their online communities, even in groups that are not explicitly devoted to political or social activism. However, I found it difficult to find many examples of community members discussing the nature of rights; while some distinguished between civil and fundamental rights, and others argued over whether or not human rights were political in nature, it was more commonly the case that the concept of rights was taken as self-evident and self-explanatory. It was also more common that members of these groups discussed the intersections of marginalization across groups, rather than what rights are as a philosophical concept.

Another trend I repeatedly encountered was the use of phrases like “gay rights,” “queer rights” and perhaps most commonly “trans rights” as a sort of community mantra, used both in total seriousness and as lighthearted social signaling in conversation. In examining a single public group, whose emphasis is on transgender memes and in-group jokes, I documented 20 individual posts which were either centered on the phrase “trans rights” or whose comments mentioned the phrase (see Appendix, Section 4, pp. 12-15). These posts range from joking (featuring images which “accidentally” feature the

colors of the trans flag, and thus claiming them as trans-friendly) to serious (concerning political concerns and discriminatory practices), to acknowledgements of sincere support for transgender individuals from various sources (e.g., politicians, private companies, artists, and media such as movies, video games and music). For members of this community, the phrase “trans rights” appears to signify far more than just a legal philosophy or international politic; it describes a moral and social position that identifies one as a member of the in-group, and someone who can be considered safe to share space with. Indeed, it seems to be the case that the invocation of “trans rights” in particular signifies the most serious level of political engagement within these communities, with the sentiment being that transgender people are the most deeply marginalized in the community and that therefore their struggle should be centered even in posts which are ostensibly light-hearted.

Another meaningful trend that emerged was the tendency for groups and pages with “queer” in their title to directly concern politics or social activism, while groups and pages with “LGBT” (or some variation thereof) in the title tended to be more oriented around community and everyday life. While as previously stated, nearly every page and group oriented around LGBT+ people in some way included politics (usually in the form of news discussions), this distinction generally held true throughout my research. Additionally, while I stated earlier on that these terms are used interchangeably—and certainly that is still common to see—it also seems to be the case that people associate the term “queer” with more radical and politically-animated ideas about identity and rights (see Appendix, Section 1, Post 2, pp. 2-5). Some commenters stated that they preferred the open-endedness of the term, while others stated that they found it more politically relevant and descriptive of their lived experiences outside of societal norms. It seems important, then, to reflect on the discursive practice in these spaces of differentiating between these terms, and ask what distinguishes those that choose to call themselves “queer” from those which use some variation of the well-known acronym. In this case, the application of critical discourse analysis will be useful, as it

will help us to describe the relationship between these terms and the sociopolitical power structures they emerged in response to.

5.3B What did queer people find significant in their discussions of human rights?

Another trend that I saw repeatedly during my research were posts pointing to the failures of human rights bodies to treat LGBT+ rights seriously. One post decried the hypocrisy of a human rights organization in the U.S. state of Virginia, who refused to take disciplinary measures against a commissioner who posted openly hateful content on his personal social media. In these posts, the commissioner called homosexuality "a mental illness" and gay people "abominations to the human race;" and yet the chair of the organization dismissed these posts as merely a matter of "individual beliefs" (Bollinger, 2019). Some commenters were outraged that such an individual would be hired to a human rights position in the first place; others were upset that homophobic views would be dismissed as merely "opinions" by the organization in question (see Appendix, Section 1, Post 3, pp. 4-5). Similarly, in another post, commenters expressed unsurprised disappointment at a move by the Trump administration in the U.S., who in May of 2019 planned the launch of a human rights panel founded on "natural law"—a philosophy which is regularly used by conservative religious and political bodies in the U.S. to argue that queer people are unnatural, and do not fall under the umbrella of human rights protections (Christnot, 2019). Many commenters shared the perspective that calling this panel a "a human rights" panel was both inaccurate and insidious, implying a common belief that the inclusion of queer people is a necessary feature of a human rights framework, and that any attempt to erase them is fundamentally opposed to the philosophy of human rights (see Appendix, Section 1, Post 4, pp. 5-6).

However, it would be disingenuous to pretend that all LGBT+ people globally believe in the ideology of queer liberation, or that all are inclined towards a progressive world view where it concerns gay and transgender rights. Indeed, there are many who believe that their sexual and gender identities do not warrant special protections, and

still more who believe that they are merely suffering conditions which ideally could be cured. Since my research largely concerns conversations centered on human rights, the demographic of LGBT+ people who hold more conversative values tends not to be represented; it is also the case the conservative gay and transgender people constitute a political minority, since in many places, such as the United States, there is a strong demonstrated correlation between being LGBT+ and the tendency to identify with liberal values (Worthen, 2020). It is also worth noting that the overwhelming majority of conversative LGBT+ groups on Facebook were set to private, so the data examined here is uniquely limited. All the same, I believe it would be misleading not to provide some attention in this project to the perspectives of conservative gay and transgender people.

One example of conservative ideology in some LGBT+ spaces is the idea that being transgender is merely a mental disorder, and that while it can be solved through social and medical transition, it should not be treated as a positive experience and that transition should be limited whenever possible (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 1, p. 15). For people who hold this belief, the right to freely decide one's gender identity is not a human right; it might be more accurately described as the right to receive appropriate mental health and medical care. This idea seems to have persisted from the much older notion that homosexuality, too, is a mental illness rather than an identity, and is best treated by a range of therapeutic conversion practices which are now considered inhumane and formally banned in many countries. However, there are still many places in which conversion therapy is practiced, and its history as a mainstream practice is not in the distant past. Indeed, it was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association voted to remove homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which is widely regarded in the Western world as an authoritative text on psychiatry. Similarly, policies removing protections for gay and transgender people are still being championed by conservative politicians today, with a huge surge of anti-transgender policies being proposed in the last year alone (Ronan, 2021). This indicates that anti-gay and anti-transgender discourse thrives today even in

places generally considered progressive in terms of queer rights, and that we should not be quick to discredit their prominence in queer spaces.

While it is true that these are considered regressive fringe beliefs in most queer circles today, it is nonetheless informative as to the diverse ways in which people conceptualize rights for themselves. It is not simply the case that all those in a minority group who are negatively impacted by discriminatory laws automatically believe their rights are being infringed on; it is sometimes the case that they instead value discrimination as a right in itself, as in the case of conservative gay and lesbians who do not believe that gay couples are entitled to services from private institutions, especially if those institutions are religious in nature (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 7, p. 22). It is also the case that certain groups of queer people who have gained more political legitimacy than others sometimes engage in in-group discrimination towards more vulnerable groups; for example, cisgender gay and lesbian people who either do not believe transgender people exist, or do not believe that their existence merits any further expansion on gender-based rights (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 2, p. 17). Because these beliefs hold significant space in some LGBT+ spaces, and because these beliefs tend to emerge in relation to majority power groups, it is therefore necessary to include these perspectives in our assessment of how human rights are viewed by LGBT+ people and what applicability human rights has for these various philosophies.

5.3C How do queer people seem to value human rights?

The data I have collected indicate that queer people in Facebook communities often invoke the concept of human rights, both casually and in more serious discussions about political liberation. Many queer people seem to view human rights as a useful or even necessary tool for their political liberation, and tend to use the phrase “rights” interchangeably with “freedoms” or inclusion in national politics. For example, there are some political goals that queer people advocate for which do not necessarily align with

the traditional human rights framework, but for which human rights are invoked in their campaigning or protest messaging. In these cases, the policies being advocated for get reframed as human rights issues, and in some, the impact of that messaging is so successful that human rights bodies work to reinterpret human rights documents to include them—for example, the shift towards viewing gender-based discrimination (a foundational human rights value) as an issue that concerns not only cisgender women, as it traditionally did, but also transgender and non-binary people (see Appendix, Section 4, Post 7, p. 14). Such action certainly makes the case that a marriage between queer liberation and human rights discourse is viable, but it is also worth considering some of the shortcomings with this interaction that I encountered during my research.

5.3D Does human rights rhetoric create unity in online queer spaces?

Over the course of my research, I have argued that the most prominent failure of human rights rhetoric to accommodate queer rights is in its desire to universalize the language surrounding identity and experience. In Chapter 2, we discussed some studies indicating that the language on queer rights adopted by human rights bodies is almost uniformly Western in nature, adopting the LGBT+ acronym (or some variation thereof) and describing most struggles experienced by this group globally in terms of gay and transgender people. Similarly, I believe there is evidence in my research that the language of human rights, especially as it interacts with queer theory in these online spaces, results in discordant ideas about what definitions of sexuality and gender are acceptable, and which identity categories properly qualify as LGBT+. From the data I collected, I noticed that this phenomenon occurred more often on public pages than in groups; I assume this is because groups are typically designed with a pre-established mentality on such topics, and moderators reject or delete posts and comments which don't align with the group's general disposition. Therefore, while anyone can comment on posts on both pages and in public groups, it is more likely that groups will curate their content to appeal to a particular mindset. Conversely, pages appeared more likely to

host more diverse audiences, and therefore often featured more serious philosophical and political disagreements.

One example of this phenomenon occurs when certain cultural identities are collapsed into a pre-existing category on the LGBT acronym, such as discourse surrounding two-spirit Native Americans who are categorized as transgender, despite this identity being considered a third gender category rather than one which is "transitioned" to in Native American tribes (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 4, p. 19). Another example is the ongoing conversation on whether asexual people—who do not experience sexual attraction, and therefore do not consider themselves to be traditionally straight, gay or bisexual—should be included in the acronym (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 3, pp. 18-19). The example of asexuality highlights the problem with strict definitions for what "queerness" constitutes on a political level, and who should be included in the conversation. Those who argue in favor of asexuality being included tend to point to the non-normative nature of their sexual and romantic experience as evidence; those who argue against it typically point out the fact that asexuality has never been formally criminalized in any country the way that being gay or transgender is. The argument moves back and forth between experiential and legal considerations; are asexual people socially marginalized in the same way as gay and transgender people? Can some laws be considered discriminatory against asexual people, such as those which require marriages to be sexually consummated? A similar example can be taken from the conversation surrounding polyamory—in which a person takes on multiple romantic partners—and whether this group can be considered "queer" in the political sense. Surely it is the case that polyamorous people are discriminated against in legal matters like marriage, and their relationships by most standards are non-normative. But can a relationship which is heterosexual be considered queer, even when it concerns multiple partners? Based on the communities I examined, the conversation is clearly ongoing, and represents a lack of coherent community mobilization politically and socially.

Examples such as this lead us to question: where is the line between politics which negatively impact queer people as an unintentional consequence and those which specifically target them? The contention here seems to be disagreement over which shared experiences the community should be oriented around—social, political, or purely philosophical. When human rights rhetoric is introduced into this conversation, it tends to skew political—after all, how can international law be utilized to protect queer identities which have no discriminatory laws aimed at them?

5.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

After examining the data and the trends which have emerged during my research, I believe there is sufficient information about the language used in these communities to conduct the final analysis. As such, I will be revisiting each step I listed in my methodology chapter and arguing for my interpretation of the discursive practices observed in these spaces. I will conclude by making an argument on how this discourse has been impacted by human rights ideology, and what implications this has for the continued relationship between queer liberation politics and the human rights regime.

1.) Examine the terms and concepts that emerge over and over again in the discourse. What is treated as normative or self-evident?

As I discussed in some detail in the previous section, in these communities, human rights are generally regarded as self-evident and as inherent features of a progressive worldview. The use of “rights” (particularly “trans rights,” but often “gay rights” as well) as a political slogan and as an in-group reference is prolific, with examples from virtually every page and group I examined. A similar idea was frequently expressed in the equally popular slogan, “trans women are women.” Importantly, these terms do not seem to solely reference the concept of legal rights, but at their core express a fundamental idea about the humanity of queer people: when members of these groups say “trans rights are human rights,” they are explicitly rejecting the idea

that LGBT+ people are asking for social advancements that are unique to the community. The expression asserts the idea that rights for queer people are fundamental to the concept of rights for all people—for freedom to exist in the world as you authentically are, without judgement or exclusion. It is often argued for in queer theory that the deconstruction of ideas about gender and sexuality do not only positively impact queer people, but cisgender and heterosexual people as well. Advocates assert that we are all constrained by the power structures that enforce these social constructs, and that as such we are all made more free to explore our self-expressions and senses of self through their elimination. I think that this is the fundamental idea expressed in slogans like "trans rights are human rights," and that its frequent usage in online spaces communicates the outline of a core community philosophy.

In examining the common terminology there was also a perceived distinction between the terms "queer" and "LGBT" (and variations of that acronym). Groups and pages using the term queer in their title, and posts containing the word queer tended to be more politically oriented in nature—specifically in terms of radical politics. Groups and pages using the LGBT acronym tended to have less of a political orientation and tended to focus on community building and in-group humor. While politics inevitably appeared in every source I examined, this distinction remained clear throughout the research, and indicates an interesting relationship to some of the broader political philosophies surrounding queer identity. The term itself became popularized with the rise of queer theory as a mainstream academic practice, which can explain its perceived political undercurrents. As discussed in my theoretical chapter, queer theory argues for a rejection of assimilatory practices in the liberation of gay and transgender people, such as the political struggle for marriage equality or the right to legally identify as one of the two binary genders (man and woman). Queer theorists also generally have adopted an intersectional analysis of queer identity, acknowledging that some queer people experience enhanced marginalization through the axes of race, culture, and gender, among others. This attention to intersectionality also held true in groups and pages which identified themselves as queer (see Appendix, Section 1, Post 2, pp. 2-5).

While it is true that the LGBT acronym similarly has its origins in political mobilization, it is largely associated with the mainstream political movement, which is generally known for campaigning for marriage equality and equal opportunity measures. There is therefore some tension between proponents of either political movement, although it is not necessarily the case that this tension is expressed the same way in online communities.

Additionally, it is not simply the case that community members using one of these two terms did so explicitly because they aligned with either of the associated political philosophies. In fact, it occurred several times during the research that commenters would argue over the acceptability of queer as an identity term, with the majority of those against it asserting that the term was a slur they simply felt uncomfortable using (see Appendix, Section 1, Post 2, pp. 3-5). Some were unfamiliar with terminology outside of mainstream usage, and had only ever heard the term queer used in a derogatory way; some asserted a working understanding of the term as a political concept, but still rejected it as a slur. Those in favor also did not always refer to politics in their defense of the term, but simply stated that they found it less constraining or more fluid than other identity terms, and adopted it either because they felt unsure of what identity they fell into or because they preferred the freedom of using a blanket term. These conversations indicated to me that there is a lot of diversity in the way many terms are adopted in these online communities, and that despite the overtly political content of many groups and pages, their usage is not a simple matter of consciously aligning oneself with a social or political ideology. It is more often a complex mixture of politics, exposure to terms in different social and political contexts, personal comfort, and preferences for the type of community one wants to join.

Finally, in terms of normativity, it was my general observation that members of the widely acknowledged identity categories (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and binary transgender) were treated as unquestionably being members of the community, while other identities were subject to more scrutiny (consider again the examples of asexuality

and polyamory given in the previous section). It is likely the prominence of LGBT as an acronym has had an impact on this aspect of the discourse, but arguably there are other political and social influences affecting the conversation. In examining the data, conversations about the exclusion of non-LGBT queer people tend to focus on intersections of power and the legacy of Western colonialism (see Appendix, Section 5, Posts 3 & 4, pp. 18-19). These arguments usually totally exclude people of non-Western origin, and as some posts pointed out, tend to generate a hierarchy where those who are "really" queer are defined as those who have engaged in certain kinds of normative behavior and use the correct terminology. This discussion echoes concerns raised by Puar in her texts on homonationalism, or the idea that certain mainstream identities are legitimized by and legitimizing features of a nation which is acceptably progressive. We will explore this idea in more detail in the next section, in examining power differentials in these communities.

2.) Examine the power differentials at work in the discourse: who is given power? Who is denied power? What does this look like in practice?

One of the most obvious ways in which power is afforded to certain groups in these communities is through the fact that they are largely conducted in English, and for the most part center on the political and social situations in Western Europe and the United States. Those with a strong grasp on the English language are generally treated with more authority, as well as those who are formally educated on the topics being discussed. This tends to center the voices of white Western people who have been privileged enough to receive formal education, and who have the ability to stay up to date on national and international politics, which further marginalizes those without stable living situations and those who are cannot easily or freely access information. In this way, an information hierarchy as produced, much in the same way that Spivak describes the subaltern subject, who is only allowed space to speak when their experience is rerouted through the cultural and academic expectations of the majority power group.

Socially, there is a tendency in these spaces to eject those who do not share the dominant views of the group. This is especially true in public groups, which often feature an application questionnaire asking you to agree to certain terms (such as not engaging in hate speech or being uncivil with other members). In the theoretical chapter of this thesis, we discussed the concept of in-group policing and the phenomenon of ejecting members based on previous or current bad behaviors. In my research, I encountered this phenomenon mainly through the expression of discordant beliefs about queer identity and politics. For example, several groups adhere to certain ideological stances (see Appendix, Section 5, Post 8, p. 23), such as feminism or political leftism, even though their main function is as a space for queer community. Because of this, members who express disagreement with those ideologies are often ejected from the group. Sometimes, members are ejected for claiming to have an identity that the group does not acknowledge as real; other times, they are rejected for expressing doubt about whether a certain identity should be considered queer or not. In all cases, rather than members collectively discussing the issue, moderators simply take the side of the majority and eject the minority dissenters. While admittedly it is often necessary for groups to establish terms of engagement, these interactions often result in minority viewpoints being disenfranchised, and prevent potentially productive conversations from taking place.

Culturally, there is a tendency in these online spaces to assume that the LGBT+ acronym is a universal concept which can be applied to other languages in the form of analogues, and this concept is reinforced by the previously discussed practice of non-Western activists adopting the acronym for political expediency (Jackson, 2009). This aspect of the discourse makes it difficult to talk about identities that don't necessarily align with the normative sexuality and gender categories that are referenced in the LGBT+ acronym. This also excludes those whose identities are not easily translated into English or whose gender and sexual concepts are at odds with Western norms. Interestingly, this aspect of the discourse seems to mirror the status of the human rights

regime and international politics more broadly—particularly the tendency towards universalism. This feature of the discourse will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.) How does the discourse reflect and (re)produce ideology, the conditions of power and social hierarchy? What concepts are being constituted and reinforced by the language we use?

I have already expressed some of the ways in which terminology can be used to assert normative cultural and social values in these spaces, for example in the use of the LGBT+ acronym as a universal concept (despite other cultures not sharing these same categories), and the ways in which white Western voices are generally prioritized in online spaces that are largely conducted in English. While there were several posts in my research that tried to draw awareness to the intersection of racism and xenophobia with homophobia/transphobia, there were few conversations that questioned the universality of many terms and ideas. At best, there were sometimes conversations about cultural appropriation, for example, in the earlier discussion about Indigenous two-spirit people. In these discussions, it is generally agreed on by most commenters that this identity belongs to the Indigenous people of North America, and should not be used by anyone else. But all the same, two-spirit was conceptualized in these discussions as an Indigenous transgender identity—not something completely outside of the larger conversation about Western binary gender deconstruction, which some scholars have argued it is.

This trend continues in conversations about historical figures who are described as gay and transgender, despite these concepts not being present in their time periods. This aspect of the discourse reflects a rejection of the idea that our current sexual and gender ideologies are contingent on our own cultural and social context, a concept which was first introduced in Foucault's groundbreaking text *The History of Sexuality* (1978). Considering Foucault's work at least in part comprises the philosophical basis

for queer theory, it is interesting to see this behavior occur uniformly across groups and pages, even those which are explicit in calling themselves queer and often reference queer theory. After observing these conversations, I am left with the impression that the impulse to do so communicates a desire to reject claims made by homophobic and transphobic political groups that the existence of queer people is unnatural. After all, demonstrating that there were people in what we would call homosexual relationships, or whose gender presentations did not match their assigned sexes, hundreds or thousands of years ago sends a powerful message: "we have always been here." Yet at the same time, it reflects and reinforces a specific ideology of gender and sexuality that is not sufficiently demonstrated to be universal, and it is my opinion that we should be wary of engaging in this behavior. It is an erasure of the cultural and social diversity across the world to point to every group who we share experiences with and say, in order to express solidarity and work towards a common political goal, we cannot only be similar—we must be the same.

4.) How has this discourse has been impacted by human rights ideology, and what implications does it have for the continued relationship between queer liberation and the human rights regime?

I have written at some length in my introductory chapter about the ways in which the international human rights regime has both addressed and failed to address the rights of LGBT+ people globally. For many nations, whether or not gay and transgender people are included in certain human rights obligations has been left up to textual interpretation. For the purposes of this analysis, I believe it will be useful to return to the language of the Yogyakarta Principles for an analysis of how the rhetoric of human rights has been adapted by some groups to serve the political interests of queer people. Afterwards, I will reflect on the international status of sexual and gender minorities in the time since the Yogyakarta Principles have been published, as it will provide insight into the way the language of rights functions and how it has or has not changed over time. It will also help us to identify where there is overlap in queer online spaces.

It is my opinion that the Yogyakarta Principles represents a positive application of queer theory to the human rights framework. As stated in the literature review, it attempts to fill gaps in international law with regards to what has historically been an inconsistent set of standards that states are asked to adhere to with regards to gender and sexuality. The strength of this document is in its wide-reaching definitions of sexuality and gender. Returning to its introductory propositions, we can reflect on these definitions, which refer to sexual orientation as “each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction” to members of the same or other genders, and gender identity as “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means)” (Introduction, Yogyakarta Principles, 2007/2017). These definitions are reminiscent of those one can find in queer theory. They are non-specific with reference to identity terms, and are not limited to merely sexual attraction or binary gender transition. They can easily be applied to any political or cultural framework surrounding queer liberation precisely because they are not specific about terminology, and are not beholden to the specific cultural trappings of Euro-American discourse. However, it is obviously not the case that these definitions have been widely adopted by global state governments, as it is not a legally binding document; it also does not seem to have had significant bearing on the acknowledgement of sexual and gender discrimination formally adopted by the United Nations. In practice, human rights discourse tends to center the sexual activity of queer individuals, rather than their capacity for emotional and affectional relationships, which postures their marginalization as an issue of sexual activity rather than one of broader social and cultural alienation. I believe this is indicative of the larger issues with human rights discourse in relation to queer identity; by asserting strict definitions not only about who is considered queer but what specific behaviors queerness entails, those who fall outside the bounds are either forced to adopt these behaviors or risk being excluded from protection.

According to Human Dignity Trust, to date, there are still 67 UN member states in which being queer is in some capacity criminalized (Human Dignity Trust, 2022). In many of these countries, it is specifically sexual activity between same-sex individuals which is criminalized, with an emphasis placed on “sodomy” or sexual encounters between men. In 10 of these countries, same-sex sexual activity can result in the death penalty. There are also 10 in which gender expression is criminalized for transgender people. Considering that the Yogyakarta Principles are now 15 years old, and human rights organizations have been discussing LGBT+ issues since 1994 (with reference to the Toonen vs. Australia case, which established homosexuality as a protected status in the ICCPR), it is shocking to see nearly 35% of member states have not adopted any protective policies for gay and transgender people—let alone anyone who falls outside of those categories. Interestingly, even among states that do not criminalize queer people, same-sex marriage is only legal in 28 member states, indicating a lack of positive obligation towards queer people as a protected group.

These statistics prompt a number of different questions about discourse in the human rights regime. As previously mentioned, there is a lot of emphasis placed on sexual activity, and very little oriented around the daily lives of queer people. This is even further indicated by the fact that so few member states have implemented same-sex marriage, despite having decriminalized same-sex sexual activity. Despite attempts by organizations like the International Panel of Experts in International Human Rights Law and on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (authors of the Yogyakarta Principles), which emphasize emotional relationships as well as sexual, most UN member states with homophobic laws still center their policy language on sex, “sodomy” and “gross indecency” (Human Dignity Trust, 2022).

This language often makes its way into online discourse as well, not only in the form of bigotry (those who visit pages or groups in order to spread homophobic rhetoric) but also in disagreements that occur over whether someone is “actually” queer, in the

sense of having sexual experience with the same gender or having received gender-affirming surgery/hormonal treatment. These behaviors are harmful, as they exclude those who are closeted, in unsafe living environments or who lack the resources or even the desire to medically transition. The identities of all queer people should not be contingent on these aspects of their bodies and behavior, but rather because they earnestly identify as such. It also erases the violence experienced by queer people for merely expressing their identities, even if they do not yet have “real” experience with their sexuality or gender transition.

5.5 Proposals for Change

I think it is important to finish this analysis by discussing ways in which human rights discourse and queer discourse online can be transformed in order to better serve the political goals of the groups they concern. This research has prompted several questions about which features of the discourse must be revised or discarded altogether in order to produce new practices that better represent the queer community as a marginalized political group, and I will try to address them here.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate my belief that there is an overemphasis in human rights discourse on the specific gender and sexuality categories that are Euro-American in origin. This serves to exclude those whose cultures do not readily translate into these categories, or at the very least forces them to adopt certain terminology in order to be taken seriously by human rights bodies and activist organizations. Changing this paradigm by challenging the idea that queer liberation rhetoric is universal in all cultures will be necessarily for creating human rights projects that can properly address rights violations on a local and regional level. On the level of discourse in queer communities (online and in general), this will also have the effect of bolstering open-mindedness in multicultural societies and spaces, and foster acceptance of the diverse ways in which people conceptualize their identities.

Similarly, I believe there is an overemphasis in policy on the specific activities that are associated with queer identities—for example, whether they remain in same-sex relationships, or whether a transgender person chooses to detransition later in life—which restricts their freedom of self-exploration and in some cases has even led to further political alienation. It is thus my position that any attempt by national governments or human rights bodies to police gender or sexual identity through the development of regulated definitions is dangerous; at worst it is actively violent. Queer identity is not fixed or easily delineated, and political or social movements which posit them as such are inherently harmful, especially for non-Western queer people, who do not always use similar categories or terminology to describe their experiences. For example, in Deniz Akin's 2016 study on queer asylum seekers in Norway, she describes the phenomenon by which non-Western queer people "translate their sexuality, sometimes strategically, to become readable in the Norwegian context… As a result, queer informants contribute to the (re)production of new norms about what it means to be a genuine queer person in need of protection" (Akin, 2016). Akin describes the tenuous position queer asylum seekers are placed in when they are expected to "prove" their sexual or gender-based marginalization through the adoption of certain terms, or adherence to certain behaviors. An identity politics which protects and acknowledges the humanity of queer people must therefore allow for the fluidity and changeability of queer identity, over time and across different cultures. Additionally, it can be traumatizing for government agencies to interrogate the personal lives of queer people in order to make sure they are "really" gay or transgender, especially in situations such as asylum where they lack the power to consent to these procedures for fear of being subjected to serious harm. In order to change this, the human rights regime must stop interrogating the personal lives of queer people, particularly regarding their sex lives and the state of their bodies, as this reproduces harmful norms about identity both discursively and politically. Instead, they must adopt language which allows people to freely identify as queer or LGBT+ without scrutiny.

Finally, I would like to note once more that in having this conversation about change in queer spaces, it is crucial to center the voices of the most marginalized members of the queer community and discuss how their contributions have been understated, trivialized or erased from the larger discussion of queer rights globally. Because I was not able to perform the interview component of this research, this is not possible for my project; any attempts to do so would be filtering the ideas of others through my own understandings and sense of priority. I hope that in the future other studies can achieve this and provide greater understanding on these crucially important topics.

5.6 Analyzing the Methodology

Overall, I think that CDA was an effective method of analysis for this project. Its strengths were in its ability to examine the intersecting matrices of power and oppression that define the relationship between queer people and human rights as a global network of sociopolitical institutions, and its ability to draw into question the nature of the language that we use when engaging in political and social justice discourse. It complemented the theory that I engaged with, especially in terms of queer theory, intersectionality and post-colonial theory. However, this method did create certain challenges for my research and in some places was insufficient.

The main limitation of this method was that the vast majority of queer/LGBT+ groups that I came across in my search were private. This severely limited the amount of posts I was able to examine for this project, and merits a discussion on the nature of conversations that happen in public versus in private online communities. It is perhaps the case that this project would have been better served by a deeper analysis of two or three private groups with many active members, rather than the larger number of dispersed public posts I was able to track. However, I believe that my chosen approach to this research was more ethically sound; in order to access the contents of a private group, it would have been necessary for me to contact the group administrators for

permission, with the stated requirement that a post be made by myself or the administrators informing members of the project and its observational component. However, many of these groups have hundreds or thousands of members, and obtaining informed consent from every member would not be possible. Even without stated permission from every member, not every person sees every post in a group—so even informing the group at large about the project would not ensure every member was participating with the knowledge they might be observed. I also felt that this tactic would be unduly invasive for members who chose to join a private group precisely because their posts and comments would not be made public. This raises the question that many researchers face, and which I have addressed my stance on several times throughout this paper: is the quality of the research more important than the agency that its subjects are given through participation? Can invasions of privacy that potentially endanger participants be justified by the results of the research? I personally believe that this question must be weighed very heavily against the perceived merits of the research, and thoroughly demonstrated by the researcher before data collection takes place.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 Revisiting the Research Questions

Having concluded the analysis, it's time to readdress the central research questions of this project, and ask whether the research has answered them effectively. I believe there are several ways in which this analysis reinforced the arguments made at the beginning of the project, and some ways in which they have produced further questions. For the sake of organization, I will go over each research question individually to reflect on and measure the validity of my conclusions.

1. How has human rights language been utilized in Facebook communities that are concerned with queer identity/liberation?

It is clear that human rights rhetoric is for the most part treated as a given feature of liberation politics in general, and slogans which reference human rights (such as "trans rights are human rights") often appear in political discourse in these spaces. However, it is also the case that this rhetoric generally goes unquestioned, and there are not many instances in my research of Facebook communities discussing what human rights actually entail politically, or reflecting on how they are applied to queer liberation. For the most part, the slogans are employed as rallying cries for all kinds of political goals (marriage equality, legalizing gender transition, equal access to public spaces such as bathrooms and sports, etc.), and the prominence of this rhetoric has impacted everything from in-group humor to political mobilization. It is clear that human rights discourse animates the discussion of liberation in most of these spaces, and the philosophical implication of invoking human rights seems to be that the rights of queer people are not unique, but are rather necessary for the liberation of all people, including those with normative sexual and gender identities.

2. How has the spread of human rights discourse in online communities, particularly on popular SNS platforms like Facebook, impacted the way that queer communities discuss and advocate for their liberation?

As previously stated, the use of human rights language in these communities has spawned a number of different slogans which have become synonymous with queer liberation today, with “trans rights are human rights” being the clearest example. It is not entirely clear from the research exactly what impact online communities have on the larger political project of queer liberation, but I think it has been demonstrated that terminology used online strongly reflects that which we see in real-world protests and political campaigns, and that there is a strong relationship between these online communities and political movements centered on queer people. This research has also demonstrated that queer communities on Facebook utilize human rights language to invoke in-group values as well as in casual contexts, usually in the form of jokes or memes. In general, it is clear that human rights is a topic that appears frequently in these communities, and the majority of the posts I studied for this project included some reference to human rights when discussing politics in general.

3. Is it better for queer liberation movements to adopt an international standard for terminology based on mainstream human rights discourse, or should liberation movements instead adopt localized cultural language concerning gender and sexuality?

This is the research question which is both the most complex and the most strongly addressed by my project. It has been demonstrated that human rights language is already, to some extent, mainstream in online queer communities and to an even greater degree in real-world political movements. It is also clear that there are some issues in the way that human rights language has been implemented with reference to queer rights, since a large percentage of UN member states maintain actively homophobic and transphobic policies, and have opposed resolutions on gender and

sexuality many times in the 28 years that the topic has been discussed internationally. This suggests that merely invoking human rights as a general concept is insufficient for liberation movements to garner support politically. It therefore must be further elucidated on what human rights actually entail, and what aspects of political marginalization can actually be addressed by the human rights framework. For this reason, I believe it is important that we continue to interrogate the discourse of human rights and, if reform is possible, work to expand existing definitions in the legal framework to include queer people from all cultures and identity groups, rather than only those that fit neatly into the internationally established Western categories. In doing so, queer liberation groups can specifically identify the viable avenues human rights provides towards political progress, such as in generating clear standards nations can adopt when discussing not only legalization measures but also positive obligations towards queer people. There is clearly a benefit to addressing sexuality and gender as related intersections of oppression, and in this sense, having a framework which focuses on those categories is essential to international rights projects; however, such projects must be localized and oriented around regional concepts of gender and sexuality. Similarly, definitions of queer identity which are as open-ended as possible (such as those found in the Yogyakarta Principles) and which allow for fluidity and identity changes over time are absolutely essential for human rights organizations who want to accurately and compassionately address the complexities of queer experience across the world.

6.2 Methodology vs. Theoretical Framework

For the most part, the theoretical framework I developed interacted well with my methodology, which consisted of non-participant observation and critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis shares its philosophical foundations in many of the same theories that I employed for my research, including Foucault (who is widely credited with developing the theory of discourse CDA employs), Spivak, Crenshaw, and Puar, who are all openly concerned with the intersection of language and political power.

The only significant conflict which emerged during the study was my stated desire to center the voices of the most marginalized in the community (with reference to the work of Tuck and Yang) against the method of non-participant observation. The interview portion I had planned for this project was intended to supplement the observational component and give greater depth to the conclusions drawn from data collection. Because I was unable to find participants for the interviews, a large part of the analysis was necessarily influenced by my own unconscious biases and sense of what is important. While I tried to limit this by refusing to use coding in my analysis, and by providing direct screenshots and quotations whenever possible, it is nonetheless the case that an observational study is at odds with some tenets of my theoretical position. In their work, Tuck and Yang argue that we should always question whether research is *necessary* and whether the pursuit of knowledge serves those who are being studied or those who view knowledge as something they are simply entitled to. I also consider this to be a crucial question in conducting research. In my work, I have tried to demonstrate the necessity of this type of research and how it benefits a community that I am personally a member of, and in the next section, I will argue that this research project was in fact beneficial to the group it concerns.

6.3 What Was Gained from the Research?

This study revealed several trends in the way that queer people talk about human rights online, and the ways in which those conversations are oriented politically and socially. One of the primary conclusions I've drawn from this research is that queer people in these communities tend not to interrogate human rights as a concept, but to treat it as a given or *a priori* feature of political liberation ideology. In this way, human rights language is demonstrated to be deeply ingrained into conversations about queer political progress. However, based on my theoretical position and some additional research on queer liberation movements globally, I argue that taking human rights as a necessary or obvious feature of political progress can be problematic, and should be

engaged with critically. It is my position that greater interrogation of what human rights actually are, as well as more awareness on the history of the international human rights regime, would benefit marginalized groups who utilize that language in their struggle for liberation. I believe that this argument is strengthened by the results of my research, and that an examination of the language used in these communities has been extremely useful in furthering discussion on this topic.

Similarly, I argue that this project demonstrated a need for further research on this topic, especially in the form of qualitative interviews and with further attention paid to communities which are non-Western and conducted in languages other than English. The majority of my data collection took place on pages and in groups which were not only majority Western, but in all likelihood majority American, considering the multitude of posts which focused on American politics. While analysis of that content certainly has much utility, it revealed the difficulty of accessing certain perspectives and communities externally, and challenged the notion that the internet serves a neutral ground for global communication. The project also demonstrated that further studies which conduct in-depth analyses of private groups, if obtaining consent for such a thing is possible, could be extremely useful and further elucidating on the state of political discourse in online queer communities. It was generally my experience that public pages tended to be more inflammatory in their discussions about rights than public groups, which featured deeper discussions but were nonetheless still limited by the lack of privacy. As such, it would be enlightening to compare the results of this research to a project which focuses on more private spaces.

6.4 Which Questions Remain After the Study?

I believe it is important to reflect on the state of the world before and after this research project was designed and carried out. For me, one question that emerges at the end of this project is how things may have shifted significantly in the two years since the initial research was conducted. It is undoubtedly the case that 2020 was a year

resulting in major sociopolitical shifts across the world, as we were collectively asked to restructure our entire lives around the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, it seems that conducting this research in 2019 may have been the last possible moment to do so before online communities everywhere became consumed with discussing the more immediate danger of COVID-19, and according to some sources, many academic research projects were negatively impacted during this time (Lewis, 2021). However, national controversies and conflicts continue to occur even during global crises, and in 2020 some of these sparked increasingly urgent conversations around social inequalities—one thinks of the infamous police murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020, which ignited international acknowledgement and global protests in honor of the increasingly well-known Black Lives Matter movement. It is also the case that 2021 was the deadliest year on record for transgender women in the United States (Human Rights Campaign, 2021), and even in many Western countries, bills and policies are being proposed at a rapid pace to limit the rights of LGBT+ people. I believe it is not an overstatement to say that this project was conducted at the cusp of an era of sociopolitical action that will be studied for decades. I do not think that this renders the research findings less meaningful, but find it is useful to reflect on how quickly things change on the global political stage, and how those changes impact the way that we perceive the issues at hand.

Another question that emerges from this study is how queer people globally might interact differently with the concept of human rights if it was widely understood in its historical and political context, rather than as an *a priori* concept taken as self-evident by most people. As was stated earlier, over the course of this research, I found that practically no posts addressed the concept of rights as a contentious philosophical idea, apart from one which called them “undoubtedly leftist” in origin (see Appendix, Section 2, Post 1, p. 6). It is also worth noting that the page which posted this had a specifically political bent, rather than only being oriented around queer community, which may have some influence on its assessment of human rights as fundamentally leftist. I had hypothesized from the beginning of my research, based on my personal experience with

rights discourse in and outside of the queer community, that human rights would be an assumed concept for most people rather than one drawn into question. The data seems to bear this hypothesis out. While an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon would require another research project entirely, I believe this project has revealed interesting insights on how human rights are perceived in these communities, bearing in mind that their wider applicability is limited.

Another question is whether this study uncovered anything particularly enlightening related to cultural exchange or cultural diversity in queer spaces. It is certainly the case that I came across several posts during my research which were concerned with the intersection of homophobia/transphobia and racism, and awareness of how racial, ethnic and religious discrimination compound the harm that queer individuals face in different parts of the world. Yet every post accessed was written in English, and without violating the privacy of the individuals interacting with these posts, it is not possible to form any meaningfully quantitative conclusions about their cultural demographics. However, it is my assumption based on the topics discussed that the majority of group members and commenters were either American or European, and tended to approach issues from the wider Western perspective. With those limitations in mind, I do think it is worthwhile to reflect on the tendency in queer spaces to discuss other intersections of power and how marginalization is compounded by different lived experiences, such as being non-white, non-Western, disabled, neurodivergent, and so on. All of these discussions have implications for how queer people view human rights, as they often imply the sentiment that none of us are free until the most marginalized among us are, and that therefore it is not simple to separate rights into distinct categories and approach liberation movements as individual projects.

6.5 Final Comments

What stands out to me at the end of this project is that there are many ways in which this research could have been more thorough, and many aspects of the topic

which could be explored in much greater detail. The value of a good study is not simply in its capacity to answer questions, I believe, but also in its ability to further reveal what is unknown to us and drive our search for knowledge in new and unexpected directions. Personally, the course of this research left me with many more questions than I began with, and a greater appreciation for the multi-faceted nature of what appeared to be a straightforward question: do queer people talk about human rights on Facebook? It is clearly not so simple. Different communities approach the question of rights in unique ways; some do not use the phrase “human rights” at all, but nonetheless have endless discussions on the topics which human rights as an ideology purports to cover.

Further, as a member of the community in question, I have come away from this experience understanding that the spaces I inhabit are not necessarily indicative of what the community at large looks like. In fact, it left me with the impression that referring to the “LGBT+ community” as a group with any sort of coherent ideology or unifying political experience is perhaps unjustified. There is an incalculable number of different ways in which queerness manifests across different cultures, and even between individuals. While political movements may encourage us to see our unifying experience as one of pain and alienation, this project has made it clear to me that the core of what draws us together as a global community is a desire to strip away every limitation in society that prevent us from living in joyful truth, and from exploring the manifold ways in which that truth can evolve and change.

Finally, I want to remind readers that today we are witnessing a troubling shift in global politics concerning queer people and their rights. The world over, queer people, and especially transgender people, are having their existence aggressively questioned and threatened by those who do not wish to see dominant sociopolitical norms overturned. Even in countries where gay marriage has been established for many years, and where sexuality and gender have long been considered protected statuses, we are seeing an enormous wave of prejudice and regressive politics manifest into hundreds of proposed anti-LGBT+ bills annually. It may be the case that the human

rights regime has failed, as an international institution and as an ideological body of works, to protect queer people globally; if so, a new paradigm must necessarily take its place. It may also be the case that reform is possible, and that human rights rhetoric can be utilized to protect those who are increasingly marginalized by the binary and heteronormative state of global politics. Whatever the case, we must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to combat bigotry, to overturn whatever systems no longer serve us, and to create a world where everyone is free to live in joyful authenticity.

Bibliography

Adam B.D., Duyvendak J.W., Krouwel A. [1999], “Gay and Lesbian Movements Beyond Borders? National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 344-371.

Akin, D. (2016). Queer asylum seekers: translating sexuality in Norway. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43(3), 458–474. doi:10.1080/1369183x.2016.1243

Alexander, J. (2002). “Homo-Pages and Queer Sites: Studying the Construction and Representation of Queer Identities on the World Wide Web.” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, 7(2/3), 85–106.* doi:10.1023/a:1015888915258

Anderson, B. and Wood, M.A. (2021). "Doxxing: A Scoping Review and Typology", Bailey, J., Flynn, A. and Henry, N. (Ed.) *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-Facilitated Violence and Abuse* (*Emerald Studies In Digital Crime, Technology and Social Harms*), Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 205-226. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-848-520211015

Barrot, J. (2021). Social media as a language learning environment: a systematic review of the literature (2008-2019), Computer Assisted Language Learning, DOI: 10.1080/09588221.2021.1883673

Bollinger, A. (2019, August 17). The Trump administration will launch a human rights panel that stresses antigay 'natural law'. Retrieved June 09, 2020, from https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2019/05/trump-administration-will-launch-human-rights-panel-stresses-antigay-natural-law/?utm_source=notification

Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 29*, 447-466. Retrieved January 9, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/223428

Bozkurt, A., Yazıcı, M., & Erdem Aydın, İ. (2018). Cultural Diversity and Its Implications in Online Networked Learning Spaces. In E. Toprak, & Evrim. G.K., Supporting Multiculturalism in Open and Distance Learning Spaces (p. 56-81). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

Brayda, W. C., & Boyce, T. D. (2014). So you Really Want to Interview Me?: Navigating “Sensitive” Qualitative Research Interviewing. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 318–334. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691401300115

Christnot, A. (2019, October 26). Virginia Human Rights Commissioner Who Said Gay People Are An 'Abomination To The Human Race' Will Keep His Position.

Retrieved June 09, 2020, from https://www.comicsands.com/virginia-human-rights-lgbtq-discrimination-2641095351.html?utm_content=inf_10_3759_2

Council of Europe: Commissioner for Human Rights, *Human Rights and Gender Identity*, 29 July 2009, CommDH/IssuePaper(2009)2, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4a7bff742.html [accessed 2 April 2022]

Crenshaw, K. (1991). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989, Article 8. Available at: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241-1299. doi:10.2307/1229039

Culp, A. (2016). *Dark Deleuze.* Retrieved June 15, 2020, from https://manifold.umn.edu/read/dark-deleuze/section/fba38040-7b5e-435c-b9ce-cebc2949d027

Das, S., & Farber, R. (2020). *User-generated online queer media and the politics of queer visibility. Sociology Compass.* doi:10.1111/soc4.12824

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Forestiere, A. (2020). America's War on Black Trans Women. *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review*. Retrieved April 18, 2021, from https://harvardcrcl.org/americas-war-on-black-trans-women/.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*. 1st edition. New York: Pantheon Books. Print.

Foucault, M. (1981). The Order of Discourse (R. Young, Ed.). In *Untying The Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (pp. 51-76). Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., & Bierer, B. E. (2017). Using Social Media as a Research Recruitment Tool: Ethical Issues and Recommendations. *The American journal of bioethics : AJOB*, *17*(3), 3–14. doi:10.1080/15265161.2016.1276644

GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC. (2013). Out online: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth on the Internet. New York: GLSEN.

Gold, M., & Klein, L. (Eds.). (2016). *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt1cn6thb

Gray, M. L. (2009). Negotiating Identities/Queering Desires: Coming Out Online and the Remediation of the Coming-Out Story. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *14*(4), 1162–1189. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2009.01485.x

Human Dignity Trust. (n.d.). *Map of countries that criminalise LGBT people*. Human Dignity Trust. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/?type_filter=crim_lgbt

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2019). *A National Epidemic: Fatal Anti-Transgender Violence in the United States in 2019*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://www.hrc.org/resources/a-national-epidemic-fatal-anti-trans-violence-in-the-united-states-in-2019

Human Rights Campaign. (2021). *Fatal violence against the transgender and gender non-conforming community in 2021*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from https://www.hrc.org/resources/fatal-violence-against-the-transgender-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2021

International Conference on LGBT Human Rights. (2006). *Declaration of Montreal* [Online]. Available: http:// www.declarationofmontreal.org/declaration/ [Accessed 4 February 2019]

Iosifidis, Petros & Wheeler, Mark. (2016). Public Spheres and Mediated Social Networks in the Western Context and Beyond. 10.1057/978-1-137-41030-6.

Jackson, P. (2009). Global Queering and Global Queer Theory: Thai [Trans]genders and [Homo]sexualities in World History. *Autrepart*, 49(1), 15-30. doi:10.3917/autr.049.0015.

Jeske, D., & Shultz, K. S. (2016). Using social media content for screening in recruitment and selection: pros and cons. Work, Employment and Society, 30(3), 535–546. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015613746

Lam, H. (2016). "Social media dilemmas in the employment context," *Employee Relations*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 420-437. https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-04-2015-0072

Lewis, D. (2021). *The COVID pandemic has harmed researcher productivity – and mental health*. Nature News. Retrieved April 19, 2022, from https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-03045-w

Lovell, N. (2015). *Theorising LGBT Rights as Human Rights: A Queer(itical) Analysis* (Unpublished postgraduate dissertation). University of Leeds. Retrieved February 4, 2019, from https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/30/theorising-lgbt-rights-as-human-rights-a-queeritical-analysis/

McClean, G. (2011). Multicultural Sociability, Imperfect Forums and Online Participation. *International Journal of Communication, 5*. University of West Sydney. Pp. 1649-1668. doi:932–8036/2011164

McDonald, P., & Thompson, P. (2016). Social Media(tion) and the Reshaping of Public/Private Boundaries in Employment Relations. International Journal of Management Reviews, 18: 69-84. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12061

Montesanti, S.R., Abelson, J., Lavis, J.N., Dunn, J.R. (2017). Enabling the participation of marginalized populations: case studies from a health service organization in Ontario, Canada, *Health Promotion International*, Volume 32, Issue 4. 636–649. doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dav118

Moree, D. (2018). Qualitative Approaches to Studying Marginalized Communities. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.* Retrieved 28 Mar. 2022, from https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-246.

MSNBC. (2017). “Laverne Cox: 'We are not safe in this country'.” Retrieved January 13, 2020, from https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc-news/watch/laverne-cox-we-are-not-safe-in-this-country-883701827670.

Nguyen, H. K. (2014). *Critique on critical discourse analysis*. Unpublished manuscript.

OHCHR: Office of High Commission for Human Rights. (2015). *LGBT UN Resolutions*. [online] Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/LGBTUNResolutions.aspx [Accessed 4 Feb. 2019].

Postmes, T. (2010). Social identity model of deindividuation effects. In J. M. Levine & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of group processes & intergroup relations* (pp. 794-797). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412972017.n245

Puar, J. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham; London: Duke University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv1131fg5

Puar, J. (2013). Rethinking Homonationalism. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 45*(2), 336-339. doi:10.1017/S002074381300007X

Rasmussen, T. (2016). The Internet Soapbox. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Ray, R. (2019). Michel Foucault: “The Order of Discourse”. [Unpublished Manuscript]. University of South-Eastern Norway.

Ray, R. (2019). Gayatri Spivak: “Can the Subaltern Speak?” [Unpublished Manuscript]. University of South-Eastern Norway.

Richardson, D. & Seidman, S. (2002). New Technologies and ‘Cyber-Queer’ Research. In *Handbook of lesbian and gay studies.* 115-139. London: SAGE Publications. Ltd doi: 10.4135/9781848608269

Ronan, W. (2021). *2021 becomes record year for Anti-Trans legislation*. Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-2021-becomes-record-year-for-anti-transgender-legislation

Russomanno, J., Patterson, J. G., & Jabson Tree, J. M. (2019). Social Media Recruitment of Marginalized, Hard-to-Reach Populations: Development of Recruitment and Monitoring Guidelines. *JMIR public health and surveillance*, *5*(4), e14886. doi:10.2196/14886

Spivak, G. (1988). “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, ed. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. MacMillan Education: Basingstoke. 271-313. (Original work published in 1985)

Statista. (2019). Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 1st quarter 2019 (in millions). Retrieved July 16, 2019 from https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/

Thompson, P., McDonald, P., & O’Connor, P. (2020). Employee dissent on social media and organizational discipline. Human Relations, 73(5), 631–652. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719846262

Trans Murder Monitoring Team. (2019). *TMM Update Trans Day of Remembrance 2019*. Retrieved from https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-trans-day-of-remembrance-2019/

Truscan, I. & Bourke Martignoni, J. (2016). International Human Rights Law and Intersectional Discrimination. Equal Rights Review.

Tuck, E. & Yang, K. (2012). “Decolonization is not a metaphor.” Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, Volume 1, No. 1 (pp. 1-40).

Tuck, E. & Yang, K. (2014). “R-words: Refusing Research.” In Paris, D., & Winn, M. *Humanizing research* (pp. 223-248). 55 City Road, London: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781544329611

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2014). “Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research.” Qualitative Inquiry, 20(6), 811–818. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414530265

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* [online]. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (1966). *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* [online]. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY. (1966). *International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural RIghts* [online]. [Accessed 10 April 2019]. Available from: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. (2011). *Human Rights Council Resolution: Human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity* (adopted 14 July 2011) A/HRC/RES/17/19

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. (2014). *Human Rights Council Resolution: Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (adopted 26 September 2014)* A/HRC/RES/27/32

Waites, M. (2009). Critique of ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’ in human rights discourse: global queer politics beyond the Yogyakarta Principles. *Contemporary Politics,* 15, 137-156.

Walther, J.B. (2011). Theories of Computer-Mediated Communication and Interpersonal Relations.

Weiner, M. D., Puniello, O.T., Siracusa, P. C. & Crowley, J. E. (2017). “Recruiting Hard-to-Reach Populations: The Utility of Facebook for Recruiting Qualitative In-Depth Interviewees.” *Survey Practice* 10 (4). https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2017-0021.

Welbers, K., & de Nooy, W. (2014). Stylistic Accommodation on an Internet Forum as Bonding: Do Posters Adapt to the Style of Their Peers? American Behavioral Scientist, 58(10), 1361–1375. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764214527086

Wilson, A.R. (2009). The 'neat concept' of sexual citizenship: a cautionary tale for human rights discourse, *Contemporary Politics,* 15, 73-85.

Wojcieszak, M. (2010). *"Don't talk to me': effects of ideologically homogeneous online groups and politically dissimilar offline ties on extremism. New Media & Society, 12(4), 637–655.* doi:10.1177/1461444809342775

World Health Organization. (2010, December 1). Gender and Genetics. Retrieved November 10, 2019, from https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html.

World Wide Web Foundation. (2018). *The invisible curation of content | Facebook's News Feed and our information diets*. Retrieved from http://webfoundation.org/docs/2018/04/WF_InvisibleCurationContent_Screen_AW.pdf

Worthen, M. (2020). "All the Gays Are Liberal?" Sexuality and Gender Gaps in Political Perspectives among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Mostly Heterosexual, and Heterosexual College Students in the Southern USA. Sexuality Research and Social Policy. 17. 10.1007/s13178-018-0365-6.