

Community Conversation on Sexuality and Gender

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Historical Context

Throughout history, same-sex relationships have been viewed differently depending on cultural, social, and temporal contexts, fluctuating between acceptance, tolerance, and persecution. In ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, homosexual relationships were common and accepted. For example, in ancient Greece, male homosexuality was considered a part of education and social life (Halperin, 2002). However, with the rise of Christianity and throughout the Middle Ages, homosexuality was condemned by the Church, branded as a sin, and severely punished, leading to the persecution of individuals with diverse sexual orientations.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the first scientific studies on homosexuality emerged. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs was the first to formulate a scientific theory on the subject, arguing that proving the "naturalness" of homosexuality could help establish a biological basis for equal legal and social treatment of heterosexual and homosexual individuals (Kennedy, 2013).

The modern LGBTQ+ movement officially began on June 28, 1969, following a police raid on Stonewall, a New York bar frequented by LGBTQ+ individuals. For the first time, the community resisted, sparking days of protests. A year later, in 1970, the first Pride March was organized in New York, marking the beginning of global LGBTQ+ activism. Since then, the community has engaged in an ongoing struggle for the recognition of fundamental rights, which intersect with multiple axes of oppression such as gender, race, class, and disability, underscoring the importance of an intersectional approach.

Political Context

Until 1969, Canadian laws criminalized relationships between men through regulations on sodomy and "gross indecency," which prohibited even public displays of affection (Levy, 2019). Although private homosexual acts were decriminalized that year for individuals over 21, they remained illegal in public spaces or when more than two people were present. In response to these restrictions, on August 28, 1971, Canada witnessed its first major public demonstration for LGBTQ+ rights, where activists presented ten demands, including the removal of terms like "gross indecency" from the Criminal Code and the equalization of the age of consent. This movement was crucial in advancing equal rights, ultimately leading to repealing "gross indecency" in 1987 and equalizing the age of consent in 2019 (Levy, 2020; Levy, 2019).

In the present day, the resignation of Justin Trudeau has raised concerns within the LGBTQ+ community regarding the potential election of Pierre Poilievre as Prime Minister. Poilievre has faced intense criticism for his comments on transgender rights, including statements interpreted as rejecting the identity of transgender women. Furthermore, his willingness to invoke Section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, known as the "notwithstanding clause," has fueled fears that progress in gender-diverse rights could be reversed in Canada (Perry, 2025). LGBTQ+ organizations warn that such measures could weaken legal protections, affecting access to services and safeguards against discrimination.

These concerns are further intensified by the resurgence of anti-LGBTQ+ policies in the United States, particularly under Donald Trump's administration. His government previously revoked protections established during Barack Obama's presidency, including restrictions on transgender individuals serving in the military and federal guidelines safeguarding trans students in public schools. Recent executive orders have exacerbated these policies, prompting a surge in

online searches by LGBTQ+ Americans seeking asylum in Canada (Mitchell, 2025). These developments underscore the importance of monitoring political changes and their potential impact on LGBTQ+ rights nationally and internationally.

Intersectionality, Identity and Diversity in the LGBTQ+ Community:

Key Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives.

To engage with the LGBTQ+ community from a place of respect and knowledge, it is essential to understand key concepts such as sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex assigned at birth. Gender identity refers to how individuals perceive and define their gender. Unlike biological sex, which is assigned at birth, gender is a classification based on behaviors, roles, and attributes. Therefore, gender identity is determined by the individual, based on the gender category with which they most identify. Privilege and power play a crucial role in this context, as individuals whose gender identity aligns with traditional societal expectations often experience less discrimination and have greater access to resources and opportunities. Gender expression, which is usually but not always linked to gender identity, refers to how a person presents or performs their gender in public. This can include choices of makeup, clothing, names, or pronouns (Eidinger, 2020). However, in a society where dominant power structures prevail, deviations from these norms may face social resistance and discrimination.

On the other hand, sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity and gender expression. There is no inherent connection between how a person identifies their gender and whom they find romantically or sexually attractive. The LGBTQ+ acronym reflects the diversity of identities within the community, where "L" stands for lesbian, referring to women who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women; "G" stands for gay, describing

individuals who are emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender; "B" stands for bisexual, referring to people attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily at the same time; "T" stands for transgender, encompassing individuals whose gender identity and/or expression differs from cultural expectations based on the sex assigned at birth; and "Q" stands for queer, a term many use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that do not conform to dominant norms. The plus symbol (+) is included to acknowledge the vast range of sexual orientations and gender identities within the community (Human Rights Campaign, 2023).

Voices and Experiences: Interviews and Outreach to the LGBTQ+ Community

Following recent political events, we reached out to members of the LGBTQ+ community in Kamloops, Canada, to better understand their thoughts, emotions, and concerns. To achieve this, we conducted a four-question interview with seven participants. Below are the interview questions:

1. In what ways do you feel the current political climate has affected the rights and protections of LGBTQ+ individuals in your community?
2. Have you noticed any changes in how LGBTQ+ individuals are treated in public spaces, workplaces, or community settings since the recent political shifts?
3. Do you feel Kamloops' local government or community organizations actively support LGBTQ+ rights in the current political climate?
4. Are you concerned about how LGBTQ+ issues may be framed in the upcoming federal Canadian election?

The interviews were transcribed, and responses were analyzed and grouped into key themes. One of the most prominent findings was the presence of anxiety, uncertainty, and

insecurity among participants. While they generally felt safe in Canada, there was growing concern about the rollback of rights, particularly for the transgender community. This fear was primarily influenced by policies implemented in the United States under President Trump, such as the executive order recognizing only two genders. Although these policies do not directly impact Canada, participants noted that the increasing polarization in public discourse and the political power of governments over LGBTQ+ rights created a sense of unease.

Regarding the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in public and workplace settings, participants did not observe immediate changes but did note a rise in hateful content on social media and other online spaces. At the same time, they recognized that allies were becoming more vocal in their support. This dynamic revealed a complex landscape where the community faces growing aggression and increased allyship. It also highlighted the privilege of allies, who can openly advocate for LGBTQ+ rights without experiencing the same risks of discrimination.

Local support from Pride organizations and other community groups was seen as crucial, with participants acknowledging their active role in advocacy and protection. However, there was also a prevailing sense of fatigue within the LGBTQ+ community, particularly among transgender individuals, who often bear the brunt of political polarization. The continuous need to defend their rights added to the burden, exacerbating feelings of exhaustion and frustration.

Looking ahead to the upcoming federal elections, participants expressed concerns about how LGBTQ+ issues might be politicized, with a particular focus on trans rights. Intersectionality emerged as a key factor, as the impact of policies varies across different groups within the community. Trans and non-binary individuals, who already face heightened vulnerability and discrimination, are particularly at risk of being disproportionately affected by political shifts.

Recommendations

To address the concerns raised in the interviews and support the LGBTQ+ community, it is essential to take collective action at various levels.

First, strengthening allyship is crucial. Everyone can play a role in pushing back against hateful or extreme views, both in person and on social media. This includes fostering respectful conversations, amplifying LGBTQ+ voices, and supporting inclusive policies. At the same time, staying informed about political party platforms and voting accordingly is vital to safeguarding and advancing LGBTQ+ rights, especially in the face of increasing political polarization.

Education and awareness also play a fundamental role in promoting inclusion. Teachers and educators should continue cultivating cross-cultural understanding to bridge social and political divides. Implementing inclusive education programs from an early age, addressing sexual and gender diversity, can help reduce discrimination and create a more accepting society.

Additionally, supporting community-based organizations is key. These groups provide essential services such as legal advice, emotional support, and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. Strengthening their capacity through funding, volunteering, and advocacy ensures that those most vulnerable, particularly transgender and non-binary individuals, have access to the resources they need.

By taking these steps, we can help counteract the growing challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community and work toward a more inclusive and equitable society.

Conclusion

The experiences and concerns shared by the LGBTQ+ community in Kamloops highlight the ongoing struggle for rights and social acceptance, even in a country where legal protections exist. While Canada has made significant progress in recognizing LGBTQ+ rights, recent

political shifts and increasing polarization, both domestically and internationally, have generated anxiety and uncertainty, particularly for transgender and non-binary individuals. The rise of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and policies, especially in the United States, underscores the vulnerability of these rights and the need for continued vigilance and advocacy.

The findings emphasize that legal protections alone are not enough; social attitudes and institutional support play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and well-being of the community. The presence of allies and advocacy organizations has been a source of strength, but the emotional and mental toll of constantly defending fundamental rights remains a significant burden. Education and awareness initiatives must be reinforced to counteract this, ensuring that sexual and gender diversity is understood and respected from an early age. Additionally, the role of political engagement cannot be overlooked, since staying informed and voting for inclusive policies is essential to safeguarding progress and preventing regression.

Ultimately, building a truly inclusive and equitable society requires acknowledging and addressing the systemic barriers that continue to affect LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those who face intersecting forms of discrimination. By fostering allyship, supporting community organizations, and advocating for inclusive policies, we can work toward a future where LGBTQ+ individuals no longer have to live in fear or uncertainty but instead thrive in a society that respects and protects their identities and rights.

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