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Orientation to Compassion

Exploring How Space Constructs Meanings of Compassion for 2SLGBTQ Individuals

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Orientation to Compassion:
Exploring How Space Constructs Meanings of Compassion for 2SLGBTQ Individuals

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Abstract: Cis-heteronormative discourses within society create experiences of homophobia, transphobia, violence, and harm for many Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexual and gender diverse (2SLGBTQ+) people. Orientations and spaces may be a means to transform culture into one that is more compassionate. Using queer poststructuralism, this qualitative research explored the meanings of compassion for members of 2SLGBTQ+ groups. Twenty interviews were conducted with self-identifying 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. Data was analyzed through Foucauldian discourse analysis. Four discursive orientations related to space and orientation are discussed: 1) spaces to unlearn and relearn, 2) spaces for call-ins and making mistakes, 3) spaces for silence, listening, and being heard, and 4) spaces for acknowledging intersectionality. For our participants, these types of spaces allowed them to explore multiple social discourses and how their experiences can orient them toward experiences of compassion.

Keywords: LGBT, Compassion, Qualitative, Orientation, Poststructuralism

Introduction

Compassion is part of the human experience. Notions of compassion permeate all aspects of Canadian culture from education to healthcare (Cochrane et al. 2019) but for many our culture is also lacking in compassion. Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other sexual and gender diverse (2SLGBTQ+) individuals often face the consequences and inequalities of the history of violence and discrimination of Canada despite the ongoing efforts of 2SLGBTQ+ organizations to change social and cultural views of gender and sexuality (Smith 2020). 2SLGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience violent victimization in their lifetime (Morrison et al. 2021; Perreault 2020) and due to social stigma are disproportionately affected by mental and physical health issues such as depression, anxiety, suicide (Government of Canada 2021), HIV (Bourgeois et al. 2017), eating disorders (Parker and Harriger 2020), and addictions (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2017). The socially constructed stigma, discrimination, and health inequalities that many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experience speak to the need for greater compassion within our culture and society. Creating a more compassionate culture within Canada may be a way forward to change the lives for many people, including many 2SLGBTQ+ people.

Compassion can be defined and conceptualized in many ways. For example, Strauss et al. (2016) identify five components of compassion, including 1) recognizing suffering, 2) understanding the universality of human suffering, 3) feeling for the person suffering, 4) tolerating uncomfortable feelings, and 5) motivation to act or acting to alleviate suffering. Compassion involves feelings of love, connection and actions of vulnerability and reciprocity (Cochrane et al. 2019). For Sprecher and Fehr (2005, 630):

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COMMON GROUND

> Compassionate love is an attitude toward other(s), either close others or strangers or all of humanity; containing feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding the other(s), particularly when the other(s) is (are) perceived to be suffering or in need.

These conceptualizations position compassion as an attentiveness to feelings, attitudes, and suffering, and orientation toward the experiences of all people.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others,* Ahmed (2006a) explores the meanings of orientation and what it means to be orientated or disorientated. An orientation is a starting point, "the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling" (Ahmed 2006b, 545). In other words, bodies in the world are orientated in and by the space in which they exist (Vitry 2021). Individual orientations in space are shaped by the "orientation devices" of social and cultural discourses, which repeat and over time normalize certain (e.g., white, middle class, and straight) ways of orienting to the world (Ahmed 2006a, 14–15). In this way, space is thought of as a field of action where encounters, such as the recognition of suffering and compassion response, take place: "Space then becomes a question of 'turning,' of directions taken, which not only allow things to appear, but also enable us to find our way through the world by situating ourselves in relation to such things" (Ahmed 2006a, 6). Turning allows for navigation through the world, whereby people follow along certain "lines" that are reinforced socially through repetition and habit (Ahmed 2006a). Following/reproducing these socially constructed lines make some things available to some people but not to others, including the extension of compassion: "Bodies are oriented in the world, directed toward certain things that appear as within reach, as well as away from others. But the orientations are simultaneously tied to discourse or cultural interpretations which govern the unequal distribution of comfort" (Berggren 2014, 245). In other words, bodies can either align with these socially constructed lines and become normative or bodies can misalign and transgress such lines, becoming disruptive, othered, and queered (Ahmed 2006a; Vitry 2021).

It is perhaps useful to at this point to explore the meaning of discourses in the context of this research. Discourses go beyond language to represent the interconnected systems of social meanings and practices "that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49). Discourses are all that is spoken and all that which is not spoken within society and, therefore, are representative of all the thoughts and practices, known and unknown, that construct the values, beliefs, practices, and experiences of people (Agger 1991; Cheek 2000; Weedon 1987). Discourses are intimately connected to the (re)production of knowledge and relations of power within society (Foucault 1972). Discourses are constantly merging, overlapping, and being re-created as people collectively think and talk in different ways about the world (Fendler 2010). All the various thoughts and practices, however, do not always align. Conflicting thoughts and practices become competing discourses or sites of power and political contentions that can repress, or even exclude some people. These conflicts represent sites of resistance against dominant discourse. The work of Foucault (1978) reveals that it is through the interrelationship of discourse, power, and knowledge that resistance can happen. As Foucault (1978, 101) relates:

> Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.

Resistance arises through conflicting and competing discourses that constitute discomfort with hegemonic social norms and beliefs (Jagose 1996; Weedon 1987). Discourses become the mechanism through which power and knowledge flow and act through institutions and

individuals (Linstead 2015). In the perspectives of Ahmed (2006a), orientation devices of social and cultural discourses can include lines to compassion, allowing some to experience it and others not to experience it depending on their subjectivities.

Orientation within space is especially important to groups who have been historically othered, marginalized, and who are recipients of violence, including 2SLGBTQ+ groups. Individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ live within a physical world that is all too often cis-heteronormative, homophobic, and devoid of compassion. Cis-heteronormativity, or the assumption that cis and straight are the "natural" orientations of desire, can be seen as a "straightening device," which reframes queer desire and bodies as "slanted" or "oblique" lines (Ahmed 2006a) and creates power dynamics in which 2SLGBTQ+ people are othered. Homophobia and transphobia are, in fact, an orientation toward thoughts, feelings, and judgements that reflect cis-heteronormativity. Society is set up to be a straight space in which queer people must realign themselves to fit into broader society (Burns 2021). Those who cannot "realign" along straight lines face discrimination, marginalization, and homophobia and transphobia—in other words, a lack of compassion. Queer phenomenology, according to Ahmed (2006a, 5), reorients toward the slant lines that bend away from dominant orientation devices, which depart from the "straightening" effect of those devices and in the process uncover relations and objects of desire kept out of view. Ahmed postulates that when we orientate ourselves and attend to those in the background the unfamiliar becomes familiar and the most marginalized voices are heard. The orientation toward the needs of those in the background can be viewed as compassion.

The objective of this research is to better understand the beliefs, values, and practices of compassion within 2SLGBTQ+ communities. As previously noted, many 2SLGBTQ+ people experience othering, discrimination, stigma, and hate, both within and without 2SLGBTQ+ communities, as a consequence of dominant cis-heteronormative and colonial discourses of sexuality, gender, race, and bodies. Even within 2SLGBTQ+ communities, power relations from these dominant discourses further marginalize and isolate people who are already outside (Wang-Jones et al. 2018; Weiss 2004). Othering, whether within 2SLGBTQ+ communities or without, creates disconnection. Feelings of connection or a sense of a shared humanity is often cited as central to compassion (Dutton, Lilius, and Kanov 2007); therefore, dominant cis-heteronormative and colonial discourses of sexuality, gender, race, and bodies may not orient people to compassion. Yet, despite the persistence of dominant cis-heteronormative and colonial discourses, 2SLGBTQ+ people and communities can also experience support, love, kindness, acceptance, and compassion where they live, play, and work (de Vries et al 2020). Compassion has been recognized by some gay men and lesbians as a component of their happiness and well- being (Riggle et al. 2008). A deeper understanding of the discursive nature of compassion within 2SLGBTQ+ communities may allow for social transformation—both within our 2SLGBTQ+ communities and the broader society in which we live. Ultimately, the goal of our research is to be transformative to Canadian culture and to provide insight from the 2SLGBTQ+ communities that may help all people to find ways to experience more compassion.

Methodology

Theoretic Perspective

This research is framed within poststructuralism and queer theory. These paradigms allow for an exploration of how social discourses, such as cis-heteronormativity, construct the meanings of compassion and how people become orientated to compassion. A major focus within poststructuralism is the way language and discourses construct the values, beliefs, practices, and experiences of people (Agger 1991; Cheek 2000; Weedon 1987). Poststructuralism positions

language as having multiple and fluctuating meanings depending on the social and political circumstances in which people live.

Rooted in the deconstructive nature of poststructuralism, queer theorists view sexual orientation and gender systems as constituted through social discourses (Halperin 2003; Jagose 1996; Ryan 2020). Queer theorists attempt to dismantle social assumptions about gender and sexual orientation and to disrupt the power relations and social institutions that create such assumptions (Jagose 1996). Resistance to, and subversion of, existing hegemonic social and cultural arrangements of gender and sexual orientation are central to queer theory (Jagose 1996). Berggren (2014) notes that Ahmed's work (2006a, 2006b) offers a poststructuralist queer interpretation of phenomenology in which bodies are discursively produced or orientated by experiences. Cis-heteronormativity is the product of cis and straight discourses repeatedly shaping how bodies can inhabit spaces and interact with each other; queering space involves continually butting "out of line" with straightening discourses and venturing toward a wider field of shapes and possibilities for bodies (Vitry 2021). This perspective highlights the strength of queer poststructuralism to explore discursively-produced bodies and experiences while offering ways to deconstruct the "one-to-one mapping of identity onto space" (Oswin 2008, 91). Importantly, queer poststructuralism does not isolate or privilege identity formation to sex and sexuality alone; the fluidity of spaces encompasses many discursive processes that are also classed, raced, gendered, colonized, abled, etc. (Oswin 2008). In this research, queer poststructuralism allows for the exploration of queer compassion discourses and the way meanings of compassion are constructed through cis-heteronormative and other social discourses. Such analysis may contribute to "queer world-making" (Robertson 2021), in which straightened lines lose their hold and a wider field of action is available for queer bodies to inhabit spaces.

Positionality of Researchers

As previously discussed, within queer poststructuralism, knowledge is not stable and is constructed through the historical context in which people live (Foucault 1972). Therefore, it becomes important for researchers using queer poststructuralism to reflect on their positions. The team consists of two white cisgender gay men and one white cisgender straight woman. Two members of the team have PhDs in health disciplines (dietetics and nursing) and use poststructuralism within their research programs to explore how healthcare professionals and clients negotiate beliefs, values and practices regarding health care that have been socially and institutionally constructed through relations of power. The third member is a student within health professions with a focus on addictions and community health.

Recruitment

Ethical clearance for this study was given by the Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. The recruitment process took place through Canadian 2SLGBTQ+ community organizations and social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). Eligibility for the study required participants to be 19 years of age or older, live in Canada, self-identify as part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and be interested in discussing their beliefs, values, and experiences of compassion.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed using the queer poststructural theoretical lens. Open ended interview questions were designed to allow participants to reflect on and to discuss their belief, values, and experiences relating to compassion as a 2SLGBTQ+ individual. Demographic questions relating to gender, sexual orientation, race, and age were added as part

of the interview guide as open-ended questions, allowing participants to self-identify. Interviews took place from May to September 2021 and were done virtually through TeamsTM (Microsoft. Teams. V.1.4.00.19572. Microsoft. PC. 2017). Interviews typically ranged between 60 and 90 minutes in length and were recorded. Transcriptions of interviews were produced from the recordings. Participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy. A few participants clarified parts of their transcript and their changes were made.

Data Analysis

Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to analyze the interviews. There are not any set rules or series of steps involved in conducting Foucauldian discourse analysis (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008) but in brief, Foucauldian discourse analysis involves the critical and systemic analysis of the data which goes beyond examining the surface-level of meanings and delving deeper into the historical, cultural, social and political discourses that shape meanings of people's lives, identities, and experiences of compassion.

The interview transcripts were independently reviewed by each research team member multiple times. During these reviews, each team member noted the beliefs, values and experiences of compassion and the cis-heteronormative discourses that constituted their understandings and knowledge of compassion. The data was then discussed collectively by the researchers and a consensus on the main discursive orientations was made. Any conflicts about the discursive orientations that arose were discussed between members of the team and resulted in a return to the interviews for independent review until a consensus was reached.

Results

The interviews were conducted with twenty self-identifying 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and their demographics are found in Table 1. Four discursive orientations are introduced in the following sections using quotes from the participants who have been given pseudonyms. The discursive orientations are: 1) spaces to unlearn and relearn; 2) spaces for call-ins and making mistakes; 3) spaces for silence, listening, and being heard; and 4) spaces for acknowledging multiple identities. These discursive orientations reflect that way social discourse orient participants to meanings of compassion.

Table 1: Demographical Information of Participants

ID	Age	Province	Self-Identified Ethnicity	Self-Identified Sexuality	Self-Identified Gender
Rory	24	Nova Scotia	White	Queer	Fem-leaning Nonbinary
Peyton	31	Nova Scotia	White	Queer	Cis Woman
Harley	48	Nova Scotia	White	Lesbian	Nonbinary/Agender
Charlie	50	New Brunswick	White	Gay	Genderfluid
Ainsley	24	Nova Scotia	White	Bisexual	Cis Woman
Jamie	32	British Columbia	White	Lesbian	Cis Woman
Robin	21	Nova Scotia	White	Queer	Trans Man
Reece	39	Nova Scotia	White	Queer	Cis Woman
Parker	26	Ontario	White	Queer	Trans Woman
Nicky	22	Nova Scotia	White	Bisexual	Cis Man

Alejo	36	British Columbia	Latino	Gay	Cis Man
Sloan	53	Ontario	White	Lesbian	Cis Woman
Corey	42	Nova Scotia	White	Gay	Cis Man
Skylar	22	Alberta	Asian/White	Bisexual/ Asexual	Genderfluid
Zane	26	British Columbia	Multiracial	Queer	Queer
Grey	54	British Columbia	White	Queer	Nonbinary
Emery	34	Ontario	Mixed	Gay	Cis Man
Leslie	-	Ontario	Black	Bisexual	Cis Woman
Alexis	25	Ontario	Black	Bisexual	Cis Woman
Kelly	44	Ontario	Mixed	Queer	Cis Woman

Source: Thomas

Spaces to Unlearn and Relearn

Creating space for people to learn and grow was a prominent discursive orientation in the data. Many participants highlighted the importance of being aware of their own and others' unconscious biases that are created through dominant cis-heteronormative and colonial discourses of gender and sexuality. These participants called for spaces that shake people out of their learned (prejudicial) orientations and provide opportunities to relearn different ways of being/inhabiting space. Processes of learning and unlearning were viewed as critical for fostering more understanding and compassion within and outside of the 2SLGBTQ+ communities. The act of unlearning and relearning was seen as a necessary component of being a good ally and a way to be a more compassionate person within the community. Kelly, who self-identified as a queer cis woman, stated:

> It's my responsibility as an ally with my own community to continue to unpack my biases and I know it's such a cliché, but to unlearn and relearn and to keep challenging my own biases so that I can be a better person and more compassionate. If there's something I don't understand that I can find a way to know and do my best to better understand that person's experience so that I can be compassionate; so I can be understanding.

Kelly highlighted the importance of self-examination in order to unlearn biases to better understand the experiences of other 2SLGBTQ+ people so that they may show greater compassion. Kelly indicated that this work of self-examination is ongoing, that one must "continue" to unlearn and relearn and that self-examination is a "responsibility" that comes with identification as an ally. Here, Kelly acknowledged the repetition both inherent in cis-heteronormativity—that such "biases" are reproduced over time and across space—and in the disruption of this naturalized orientation. Unlearning and relearning is a practice that must be sustained through repetition; one does not arrive at a queer space or queer orientation, but must "keep challenging" cis-heteronormativity indefinitely.

The use of the word bias in the above quote is interesting and warrants some further exploration. In this quote, Kelly is referring to personal beliefs and values—not exclusively regarding sexuality, but potentially including classist, racist, gendered or other discourses—that need to be recognized and critiqued. It appears that Kelly believed bias is negative and something that needs to be reflected upon and perhaps "unlearned." In other words, harmful assumptions or stereotypes about other people need to be replaced with new meaning. Kelly thought that all the tools for learning and understanding can be made available to individuals;

however, a key requirement for changing personal beliefs and values was a willingness to (re)learn. Once again Kelly summarized this:

> I think that we can put the human face in place, we can put the stories in place, we can put the trainings in place, we can, you know we can open, have open spaces for dialogue, we can have pride and national Indigenous people's day, we can do all these things, but people have to have a willingness to change. People have to be willing and open to learning, and I think the challenge is creating a space that people feel like they can safely express their and maybe their biases and then kind of work through that.

Kelly proposed that without that openness and desire to understand it becomes difficult to create the space for change. Kelly also suggested that people need safe spaces to discuss their biases and prejudices and openly express themselves. Safe spaces allow for an opportunity to have dialogue and difficult conversations about why they feel a certain way without fear of judgement or societal backlash. Kelly spoke about the need for both personal and social change by suggesting that it is important to create different kinds of spaces that are personally safe and that offer positive ways to address harmful societal prejudices. We can see how the suggestions of Kelly can challenge historically hegemonic cis-heteronormative discourses of oppression that could eventually lead to changes in opinion and worldview. Kelly's comment reflects the call of queer phenomenology to not simply call out straight bodies but to identify straightening devices that direct bodies of varying orientations in certain ways. Rather than separating identities against each other (e.g., queer against straight), this call for safe spaces seems to focus instead on orientation—how people come to inhabit spaces and take for granted the constructed lines they follow. There is an explicit compassion for bodies no matter where or how they inhabit spaces, in recognition that individuals inherit their personal moral compasses from socially repeated and directed discourses. Kelly also proposed that by meeting people with compassion, it allows for space to unlearn negative/hurtful views, gain more understanding, and learn a more positive way of seeing others; in other words, to move away from or reorient to the straightening lines of discourse. This is an example of how we can use compassion to negotiate power in a transformative way.

It was suggested by some participants that by questioning and breaking down normalizing, taken-for-granted social discourses and belief systems that marginalize 2SLGBTQ+ people and by focusing on discourses of common humanity we can move toward more compassion. These participants believed it was important to have an understanding that the dominant cis-heteronormative discourses of that are deeply ingrained within the lives of people. The participants thought that these oppressive social discourses and belief systems would take time to change but if we can step back and observe that we are all human and we all deserve to be loved, those belief systems can be changed. As Charlie, who self-identified as gay and genderfluid, said:

> [When] we start breaking down our own beliefs, our own belief systems, and our own social constructions, [when] we start saying it's more it's more helpful if we find common areas I think…a genuine compassion comes out of that and I think there's a way to bridge some of that [harmful cis-heteronormative] language.

Charlie believed that if we can shift our belief systems and how we interact with others by putting our focus on all the ways we are alike rather than different, it can help fight discrimination by unlearning and relearning and, in doing so, lead to more compassion in our interactions.

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Spaces for Call-ins and Making Mistakes

Rory, who self-identified as queer, fem-leaning, and non-binary, described call-ins as community-orientated processes in which people help others learn. Call-ins are spaces that foster understanding on topics through compassionate dialogues. As Rory explained, a call-in is often done with "people [who] are still learning or making mistakes with (2SLGBTQ+) language or their perspectives… you can clearly see they're trying to come from a place of compassion and it's just not coming through." As Rory further noted, a call-in is a space that you can say, "hey, like I know you meant well at this, but just so you know for the future like this is the preferred language.'" As several participants noted, call-ins are about education and having the space for, as Charlie said, an "educational moment." These participants believed call-ins are performed out of compassion and through the process create more compassion within their communities.

Several participants believed the use of call-ins was a more compassionate way to help people learn than meeting a person with hostility or "call-outs" for their mistakes. Again, participants seemed to place emphasis not on individual bodies but on the navigational plane of social discourses that direct and straighten bodies. Rory highlighted the importance of call-ins, saying that call-ins bring "some ease of learning in and doing that makes it easier for allies to have the space to learn and to make mistakes." Rory felt call-ins were spaces to facilitate learning through falling in and out of line within discursive spaces. A few participants thought that call-outs may be appropriate at certain times; however, call-outs were often perceived as harsh and can shut down the possibility of growth and learning. These participants also thought that meeting someone's prejudice, discrimination, or microaggressions with hostility can push them farther away and maintain the cis-heteronormative discourses rather than helping to reveal new understandings and to shift existing relations of power within society that create their prejudice, discrimination, or microaggressions. For these participants, compassion is providing opportunities to inhabit learning spaces such as call-ins, rather than through harsh critical call-outs that may reduce critique to bodies isolated from the discursive directions they follow. Some participants also spoke of experiences when they were met with a call-in rather than call-out. For example, Grey, who self-identified as queer and non-binary, spoke of a time when other 2SLGBTQ+ people arranged a community call-in to help them learn about transphobia and how they were misunderstanding a local community situation involving trans women. Grey said, "It felt good to feel like I'm in a community where people are going to go to uncomfortable places and talk things through with me rather than just be like you suck, go away kind of thing." Grey reflected on the sense of relief and comfort they felt in knowing people were willing to engage them in conversation and to help them understand trans issues in a compassionate way. Grey believed that compassionate call-ins allow for understanding of various orientations and that they would not be pushed away for misunderstandings that were rooted in inherited discourses.

Spaces for Silence, Listening, and Being Heard

Another discursive orientation discussed by participants was creating spaces for silence, listening, and being heard. Corey, who self-identified as gay cis-gender man, stressed the importance of listening: "Compassion within the queer community, whether you're a member or not, whether you're an ally, listening is number one." Corey believed that the act of listening is a core component in compassion and that there is a power in listening.

Many participants believed that in order to provide an opportunity for listening and being heard a safe space must be created. These participants noted how safe spaces allow for the experiences of others to be heard and recognized. Some participants said that being a good ally to 2SLGBTQ+ people means creating a safe space in which others are enabled to confide, to ask

questions, and to share their stories. Ainsley, who self-identified as a bi cis gender woman, noted that "a big thing is being a safe space for others... making sure that if people want to come to you with things they can. They can confide in, you know they can come and ask questions, they can do stuff like that." This particular expression of not only providing a safe space but "being" a safe space signals the mutually constituted relation between bodies and spaces; bodies are shaped by their environment but they also inhabit, fill, or take up space. The spatiality of bodies matters in the context of listening and recognition—bodies that listen become spaces for speaking bodies to be heard and witnessed. In a world that often crowds out marginal voices, compassion can mean using the spatiality of one's body to make room for other bodies to inhabit. Ainsley said that compassion comes from giving space for sharing and the expression of feelings. Reece, who self-identified as a queer cis woman, noted that they "…give people the opportunity to share what they're going through, and listen with kindness…respond with kindness, but really compassion means giving other people a space to tell you what they've been through and express their feelings." For Reece, providing people the space to express their feelings and share their story is an orientation to or meaning of compassion.

Some participants noted that being heard can require less effort within the 2SLGBTQ+ community spaces as there is more understanding of shared experience. These participants felt that oftentimes 2SLGBTQ+ experiences are censored during discussions within cis and straight spaces. These participants often believed that there can be an unwillingness to hear about 2SLGBTQ+ experiences in full by straight people because of their own discomfort. Making choices about how to discuss the impact of harmful actions with certain groups of people is an example of negotiating relations of power. In the following quote, Zane, who self-identified as queer, referred to two different discourses. The first discourse incorporates dominant mainstream cis-heteronormative beliefs of "other" straight people and the second discourse focuses on beliefs held by people in the queer community.

> Like with other [straight] people, sometimes I feel like I have to kind of like tamp down that experience, the volume on it so that it's more palatable to other [straight] people. I feel like with queer people… have like more capacity to hear where I'm at and also not have to change me.

Zane believed that a shared understanding of experiences among other 2SLGBTQ+ people facilitated space for listening, a capacity to hear about their orientations without a need to change themselves or to align themselves with dominant cis-heteronormative discourses. Zane seems to be describing a difference between straight and queer spaces in the extent to which (re)alignment toward straight lines is required of queer bodies; while not above being straightened, queer spaces are seen as less structured or domineering in how bodies are expected to orient within them. Some participants also brought forth the idea that shared experience and suffering have historically helped to bind them together in spaces orientated to compassion that allow for silence, listening, and the expression of shared grief.

> I think that's the basis of compassion in queer communities, it's not only the inherent understanding, but the understanding of space and silence and grief that space is not oftentimes held by people who might not, again inherently understand. So yeah, I would say compassion relates to space and silence and listening. (Skylar)

Skylar, who self-identified as bi, asexual, and genderfluid, felt compassion was connected to spaces that facilitate silence and the listening of the shared grief that many 2SLGBTQ+ people experience as a result of dominant cis-heteronormative discourses. Skylar believed that many straight people cannot easily understand the grief that many 2SLGBTQ+ people experience. In other words, a discourse of shared meaning of beliefs, values, and practices can be positive and

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uplifting. The manner or practices in which listening was performed also mattered. The idea of listening being genuine, non-judgmental, and meeting people where they are at was echoed by a number of participants. Corey highlighted the importance of how we listen:

> I hope that I put myself out there to be someone who you can come to and speak with, and you know no judgment, no opinion, no nothing. I'll listen, share some experience, share some advice if you want. If not, sometimes people just need to tell you something and then be done with it. Just get it off their chest.

Corey believed that just silently being there and genuinely listening without judging gives space for people to share their experiences and struggles and, by doing so, reveals compassion to the person, helping them to feel better.

Spaces for Acknowledging Intersecting Orientations

Many participants felt it was important to create space for intersecting marginalizations within the queer community. They thought it was critical that the diverse orientations within 2SLGBTQ+ communities be acknowledged and be given space for listening and showing compassion to each other. Skylar stated:

> Whenever I think of queerness I also think about intersectionality and how the queer community has been probably the most diverse community that I've been a part of when it comes to everything. And so recalling all these relationships I've had with people and friendships and connections I've made it's the space where I have been listened to, have been received with so much compassion on not just queerness, but on race and disability and like neurodivergence, everything.

Skylar observed that queer bodies carry intersectional orientations, not to be reduced to a single identity or even multiple but separate identities. Skylar also highlighted that within queer spaces a variety of forms of normativity and oppression are recognized and met with compassion. The recognition of multiple forms of normativity and oppression was very important to Skylar as they felt their intersectional orientations are often externalized, separated, and subjugated by social discourses of racism, ability, and mental health. Skylar saw the need to be met with compassion and acceptance.

It also was important for many participants to have safe spaces specifically for being witnessed in their intersectionality, where they do not have to pretend to conform to or "pass" rigid social understandings of what it means to be themselves. Within such spaces the participants believed they can feel comfortable being themselves and could inhabit what may be referred to as the "crossed lines of intersectional space" (Ahmed 2006a, 136–137) without judgement. Some participants suggested that this may require spaces where specific forms of normative orientation (e.g., whiteness, straightness, cis-ness) are brought forward and problematized so that people may speak to the lines that follow from them. As Jamie, who self-identified as a cis gender lesbian, said, "We need to create spaces that are for trans people and cater to their needs and then like everyone else can come visit." Jamie meant that a space should be created specifically for trans people as an example and that they are the focal point of recognition and compassion. Jamie also said,

> There's a power in having a space that's meant for you where you don't have to put on a façade." Compassion was thus found in two kinds of queer spaces: those that embrace the orientations of lived bodies as crossing many normative lines simultaneously and those that bring forward or center on specific normative lines to explore and witness their power within a broader matrix of relations.

Advocacy and activism was seen by most participants as another critical component in allowing for space for intersectionality. When engaging in either of these actions it was believed by these participants that the inclusion of the voices of the most marginalized people in the 2SLGBTQ+ communities was vital to making a more compassionate space for all. Reece discussed the importance of including trans and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in change efforts and making it a priority to allow their voices to be heard:

> Education like outreach, and centering on the needs of trans and BIPOC folks, you know whenever they… I think the queer community can do better by whenever there's any kind of event or initiative centering the needs of those people and not speaking for those people, but rather you know engaging in meaningful consultation and whenever possible prioritizing giving space for the voices of trans and BIPOC people.

Reece felt that 2SLGBTQ+ communities could do better at recognizing the discourses of colonization, racism, and cis-normativity that also serve as straightening devices to the orientations of (queer) bodies. Reece thought it was important to give spaces for trans and queer Black, Indigenous, and People of Color to share their voice and to raise recognition of the intersecting lines of normativity and oppression. Reece continued, saying:

> I feel like we as the queer community have to hold space and uplift our most marginalized people like trans People of Color are, you know among those who are disproportionately singled out by discrimination, harassment, and violence. So, you know, I feel like our communities should be embracing and you know, working to make social change, especially on behalf of those who are most vulnerable.

Reece called attention to the responsibility of all 2SLGBTQ+ communities to make space for advocacy and activism that allow for social change through disrupting intersecting discourses, as opposed to isolating and targeting specific lines of discourse (e.g., whiteness, straightness) that only serve to perpetuate how institutions break up and categorize space. In this way, participants believed queer spaces hold potential for intersectional recognition and inhabitation.

Discussion

The four discursive orientations from the data are interconnected. Spaces that foster unlearning, relearning, making mistakes, silence, listening, being heard, and acknowledging intersectionality allow for a queer orientation toward compassion to emerge; a (re)orientation toward recognizing and supporting those whose inhabitance in space exposes, cuts, and crosses the lines of identity demarcated by cis-heteronormative discourses. Through this reorientation, participants described a queer compass for compassion, in which the pathways and expression of compassion are 'aligned' around the fluidity of bodies and spaces instead of a "compulsory" or "straightened" sexual orientation (Edelman 2004; Rich 1993 as cited in Ahmed 2006, 84). Directed away from straight navigational lines, a queer compass tracks the unfamiliar and unrecognized lines of desire within normative spaces. Furthermore, as indicated by participants, a queer compass is for all bodies to explore, challenge, and disrupt various social discourses and broaden the field of compassionate actions. Listening was seen as a way to orient oneself toward compassion; however, listening was noted by several participants to often be pushed aside in favor of speaking over individuals.

As Parks (2018, 1) noted, "research points to compassionate listening creating bridges that bring people, even those from different backgrounds together." Allowing for the voices of 2SLGBTQ+ individuals to be heard (re)positions them from the background into the foreground

and creates a safer space for learning and understanding to occur. Through listening one can accomplish a change in one's orientation or view. However, this process takes time to (re)orient oneself from the dominant cis-heteronormative discourses within society. Listening allows for unlearning of biases and relearning in a more inclusive and accepting worldview. The rigid lines of cis-heteronormativity contribute to discrimination and health disparities in 2SLGBTQ+ individuals (Foglia and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2014) so by examining and being aware of one's biases it is possible to map a broader field of compassionate recognition and action.

Participants challenged mainstream notions of compassion, negotiated relations of power that had been constructed by heteronormative beliefs and practices, and ultimately offered alternative experiences of compassion. As Fox and Ore (2010, 630) stated, "new places must be forged in coalitions through a process of struggle, examining our own assumptions and privileges, challenging not only others' ignorance, but our own ignorance, and seeking new ways of interacting with those who are differently positioned from ourselves." This echoes what participants said about examining one's own biases and being allies to one another despite differences. This openness to interrogating and changing our orientations is a way of stepping "out of line" of normative spaces, transforming how suffering is recognized and compassion is distributed.

Using Foucauldian discourse analysis in this study, we were able to see how participants brought meaning to their experiences of compassion. Mainstream discourses of cis-heteronormative and colonial understandings of society were challenged by participants as they offered alternative compasses of compassion. The meaning of compassion was presented through a queer lens whereby participants told us about the strengths within and across diverse queer communities that presented a particular way of addressing compassion. Not only could compassion be successfully practiced between and amongst queer and straight people, but compassion was also constructed in unique ways within the queer community. The four main discursive orientations described in this research demonstrate effective practices of (re)orientating or queering people toward compassion. Practices such as listening, calling in, unlearning, relearning, and acknowledging intersectionality all contributed to a queer compass for compassion, made available within the queer community and beyond.

A key method of orientating toward a space for action brought up by participants is by addressing discriminatory behavior (whether intentional or not) through the use of call-ins. A call-in is effective when there is an opportunity for learning. They are often private, use accommodating language, and are education focused (Woods and Ruscher 2021). A call-in is in contrast to a call-out, which is usually public, non-accommodating language, self-promoting, and confronting (Woods and Ruscher 2021). Challenging others' ignorance by the use of call-ins rather than call-outs constructs a safe space for scrutinizing discourses rather than individual bodies and identities and thereby fostering a compassionate relearning/reorienting process.

Another important orientation toward compassion was spaces in which the intersectional inhabitance of space was recognized. Rhodes (2017, 536) stated that "LGBT commonality resides less in a shared identity and more in a shared alterity" suggesting that 2SLGBTQ+ people are diverse and have many different intersecting orientations, often hidden by the straightening device of cis-heteronormative discourse. The grouping under 2SLGBTQ+ acronym is due to their difference from a cis-heteronormative society, filing their inhabitance along rigid lines of identity. Participants discussed the importance of crossing these lines and making spaces more visibly intersectional. Safer spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ people are oftentimes organized around the dichotomy of homosexuality and heterosexuality and furthermore gay is seen as a primary identity and neglects other intersecting identities and privileges (Fox and Ore 2010; Vitry 2021). This is an example of how binaries are socially constructed through language and practices (Foucault 1978) and therefore can be challenged and changed. Binaries are constructed to be oppositional; however, by (re)orientating toward the intersectionality

between and across lines, we are constructing spaces that acknowledge, challenge, and negotiate binary relations of power as we create new possibilities for practicing compassion.

Although our sample consisted of individuals belonging to a variety of groups under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella, representation from people self-identifying as cis and white made up the majority of participants. Ahmed (2006a) noted that how bodies inhabit a given category (e.g., straightness) depends on how they inhabit others (e.g., whiteness, cisness); furthermore, these categories are not isolated or external to each other, but rather overlap and intersect. For example, to pass as white, bodies often also have to appear as straight and middle classed as well; bodies encounter the "stopping devices" of questions when any of these lines are crossed. We recognize that not every group in the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella experience or receive the same social discourses to the same extent, nor would they experience or receive compassion in the same way. For example, Walter et al. (2020) found that trans people are disproportionately affected by hate crimes. The various social discourses shaping the lives of people can affect how different groups under the 2SLGBTQ+ umbrella see the world and experience compassion. We, therefore, recognize that this data is contextualized. There are voices not reflected in our data. Further research in this area could explore what compassion means across a broader intersectionality of queer bodies.

Conclusion

This research study provides a look into what compassion means to some 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. As this group is diverse and the sample size small, we cannot make wide-ranging generalizations or recommendations, nor is this our intent. However, through our participants' voices, we were provided with a glimpse into what compassion means for some 2SLGBTQ+ individuals. The data constructs a queer compass for compassion that reveals insights into the ways compassion can be known. Spaces that orient or allow people to turn toward unlearning and relearning, making mistakes without being called out, silence and listening, and acknowledging intersectionality uncover queer understandings of compassion. Such spaces help people to navigate, challenge, and disrupt the social discourses that create the lack of compassion that many 2SLGBTQ+ individuals experience in their daily lives. In other words, through queer spaces and queer compassion discourses, many 2SLGBTQ+ people may be able to find their way through a hostile world by situating themselves within it.

As a society, we need to critique and challenge the deeply ingrained discourses of cis-heteronormativity, colonization, and racism that orient people to non-compassion toward others. The participants in this study provided insight into how certain spaces foster compassion. Knowing how to create compassion spaces can help us to challenge the status quo, orient and engage in behaviors that combat discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia. By understanding how we orient ourselves through spaces to compassion we can find new forms of compassion—queer compassion that can transform society, and in particular the lives of 2SLGBTQ+ people.

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