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A Straights Only Island? The Tellings Of How Homosexual Jamaicans Survive Heteronormative Communities

Kai Hutton
Bard College, kh2727@bard.edu

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A Straights Only Island?

The Tellings Of How Homosexual Jamaicans Survive Heteronormative Communities

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Kai Hutton

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction

Growing up I always took pride in my Caribbean heritage and will continue to do so. But I am also someone who grew up in America so I was not as connected to the life of a Caribbean person. The world that I live in compared to the world that I only know through vacations and stories told by my parents are completely different. Nevertheless, that did not stop me from embracing who I am and where my parents come from. I should first provide some clarification by telling you that I identify myself as a Caribbean man but specifically coming from ST. Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica. As a man who is both gay and Caribbean, I took pride in both of these identities but noticed that both are not as fond of each other as I had wished they could have been. Since I did not have that much knowledge of Jamaica as well as LGBTQ history outside of the U.S., I decided that for my senior project I wanted to focus on learning more about the existing gay community in Jamaica.

For my research project, I want to study Jamaican citizens who identify themselves as homosexual/gay/lesbian in Jamaica. This study will focus on how their sexuality has shaped their personal experiences while living in Jamaica. I will be looking for patterns of violence towards people who are not heterosexual still a heavy issue or if there has been a shift beneficial for the LGBTQ community. This will involve experiences that are around friendships and social life, the family dynamic within the individual's main household, and the dynamic between social expectations and self-identity. My research population will only consist of the gay/lesbian community because studying people within the entire LGBTQ community will be a long process while also keeping in mind that those who are not gay/lesbians are likely to have different

experiences along with filling a different social position. I should also mention that this specifically requires me to work with cis-gendered individuals.

I believe that studying homosexuality in the Caribbean is important because there are very few studies on this topic in the U.S. that invest time in talking about human rights in the islands. Despite this being the case there seems to be some news coverage on how Jamaican citizens react to the LGBTQ community being present on the island and so far it seems to be mostly on the tragedies of those who have been scrutinized and encountered violence. I plan to figure out if there is a pattern that exists within the gay and lesbian community in terms of comfortability with their identity on the island and the possible feelings that Jamaica might have towards this community.

Jamaica is an island known for its thriving culture, sandy beaches, Rastafarianism, and Caribbean music. As one of the most popular islands, it has garnered much attention, becoming highly valued for food, beauty, and music. Many of these aspects of Jamaica makes it seen as a paradise on earth for all to come to and be rest assured that they are welcomed. While Jamaica is known for its vibrant culture, it also has a reputation for violence against the gay/lesbian community. For many years, articles covering homosexuality in Jamaica have brought to attention the mistreatment and killings of its homosexual citizens.

My first encounter with this narrative was the article titled *The Most Homophobic Place on Earth?* on the Times news website. While I was taking a gay rights course in college I decided to begin with a small project on homophobia in Jamaica so that I can find as much information as I can about the lives of people who are part of the LGBTQ community in

Jamaica. I then came across the sorrowful story of Dwayne Jones. Her story influenced me to continue learning more about human rights in Jamaica.

_____Despite the LGBTQ community progressively gaining traction to fight back against mistreatment, it is still very common in Jamaica for LGBTQ people to face tragedies. I learned about the death of Dwayne Jones a trans teen (male to a female) often called by her nickname “Gully Queen” who was brutally murdered at the age of sixteen. In school, Jones was constantly bullied for not being masculine and this resulted in her dropping out of school. She was only fourteen at the time when she was kicked out of her home because of her trans identity and the neighbors ridiculed her. On July 22, 2003, Dwayne Jones went to a party that her friend invited her to. Some women at the party outed her identity to everyone at the party. This led to a group of men beginning to harass her asking if she was a girl or a boy. After her friend’s failed attempt to protect her, they tried to leave. Sadly, the men at the party got to Jones and began to brutally beat and stab her, she was then shot multiple times and ran over by a car. Her body was then found lifeless in a bush. Dwayne Jones' family had refused to claim her body, but after some time they changed their decision so that they could give Jones a proper send-off. Police were told not to investigate who committed the crime because they perceived the incident to be Dwayne’s fault since he knows that Jamaica is highly against his identity.

While homosexuality in Jamaica is still considered taboo, it seems as though Jamaica is slowly gaining progress in terms of actively working towards the recognition for the rights and humanity that they deserve. So far there have been two organizations that have been present to support the LGBTQ community. Jamaican Forum of Lesbian, All sexuals, and Gays (also known as J-FLAG) is the first organization to provide support for the LGBTQ community by providing

public education about the community, having pride parades, and working towards legal reform. The organization was founded in 1988 by Brian Williamson and co-founded by Larry Chang, who are both gay rights activists and openly gay men. Unfortunately, on June 9, 2004, Brian Williamson was brutally murdered, mutilated with multiple stab wounds. Many people praised his death shouting slurs and claiming that he got what he deserved for being a sinful man.

Quality of Citizenship Jamaica (QCJ) is another organization that focuses on the rights of queer people. The organization is founded by Angeline Jackson an out lesbian activist; she began her work by volunteering in two AIDS associations in Jamaica. The cofounder Jalna Broderick also started her career through volunteering. Both founders worked for Jamaican AIDS Support for Life. The program specifically provides support for lesbian, and bisexual women, and trans people. The organization focuses on providing a safe space for its members to gain emotional support and have a supportive community that can share experiences on social issues that they face in their lives. The organization's vision is to create better healthcare and mental health care while educating LGBTQ about HIV and human rights.

Literature Review

Deviant behavior causes a community to have a better understanding of the mutual feelings they have concerning morality. A community is able to define its shared values as normal when deviancy can be singled out and brought to attention in that community (Erikson 1966). Deviance, which is the violation of social rules, leads to people becoming aware of their shared expectations and values and people become highly aware of this when deviance becomes noticeable. For something to be socially unacceptable within a community it must be uncommon and as a collective, there is an agreement about what is morally correct and what is not.¹ But, the only way for deviance to be normal is if acts of deviance are occasionally happening. What I want to build upon is the fact that while deviancy is given its position in society as a way of defining normalcy so that it is easier to recognize, there is an issue with how deviant individuals are being treated for what can be their form of normalcy even though they are in spaces that will not recognize that. With deviancy being the opposite of normalcy it will immediately be given a negative connotation; thus people with the deviant identity will face hardships in the communities they are living in.

The use of stigma theory by people is used to give reason to why deviant people are inferior to them while also justifying why they deserved to be met with hostility. Stigmatized individuals will understand their own identity as a normal identity and believe that they have just as much of a right to be given an equal chance to live freely with their ideas of normal (Goffman 1986). Erving Goffman addresses this by explaining that “normal” people will often dehumanize people labeled as deviant. Discrimination towards people who are seen as deviant then becomes

¹ “...deviance can be defined as behavior which faUs on the outer edge of the group’s experience, whether the range of that experience is wide or narrow” (Erikson 26).

plausible for many of the people who are normal to partake in. Because people who are in the category of normal are so preoccupied with defining the deviance and finding ways to discriminate against them they fail to realize that the stigmatized individuals will consider themselves normal.

Human differences are first distinguished and then labeled, afterwards these labeled differences will be seen as undesirable to cultural beliefs that are maintained by the majority. They will fall into negative stereotypes and these stereotypes will be placed in a category of 'them' and those who maintain the cultural beliefs are considered 'us'; a method to make a clear distinction of who belongs to which category. Those who are in the category of them will face discrimination and be treated unequally compared to anyone else. (Moran 2012). Deviance is created through a specific step-by-step process that makes deviance more noticeable in the eyes of people who share common customs. Boundaries are then set so that people can keep these customs existent amongst each other and passed on for many generations. This is what keeps customs alive and normal for a long period. Noticeable acts of deviance are important for boundary maintenance; without the use of boundaries, a community will not be able to identify their community thus if deviance occurs constantly then the social organization will be difficult to form.

The role of the homosexual identity being a role that is specialized in being punishable and resented will cause the majority of society to keep track of purity such as criminals are a specialized role that keeps society law-abiding (McIntosh 1968). People who identify as homosexual are forced into having their sexual identity become a role that is looked down upon in society as a way of maintaining the role of heterosexuality as a role of correct sexual behavior.

Heterosexual behavior is perceived as pure by nature thus homosexuality being seen as opposite to heterosexuality is then by default perceived as impure and an indecent practice.

Both Erikson and Goffman address the purpose of deviance in society. Deviance plays the role of defining the extent to which normal behavior is broken thus indicating to people what is proper behavior and what is seen as behavior that is not agreed upon in shared communities. Moran introduces the steps that are required to notice deviance and how people will make deviance keep its position in society by labeling, separating, creating stereotypes, and practicing acts of discrimination based on the stereotypes placed on the deviant body. McIntosh specifically addresses homosexuality as deviant sexuality and the role it has when defining normalcy in a community. People who are homosexual will see themselves as normal because it is an identity that is unchangeable and natural to their own lives. But when living in a society that is predominantly heterosexual they will be the outsiders of the norm, deviants that are singled out and likely to face scrutiny. Since I am studying people who identify as homosexual I want to learn about how their experiences are defined by the role of homosexuality.

Heterosexuality has been considered normal sexuality and in this case, with many of the influences of both religion and law, this is constantly being reinforced. Men are seen as carrying on roles related to power, dominance, and leadership, and women are expected to be pure, motherly, supporters. With perceptions of what is considered as correct behavior held by many Jamaican citizens, there is an expectation that their community is not the same as one that seems less desirable. Men who display interest in other men bring into question the security of

masculinity as well as femininity being questioned if women do not display qualities that are considered proper behavioral patterns of women.²

Jamaican citizens conduct strict ways of policing gender and sexuality. With Jamaican culture displaying heterosexuality through anti-gay rhetoric and practicing an abundance of heterosexual acts this leads to identity being completely black and white for the community. Jamaican men are seen as only desiring women, wanting to fulfill needs in love and sexual desires only with women as well as women wanting to desire men for these needs. Masculinity within the community is highly defined by intense personas, often presenting toughness, rowdy behavior, and dressing in clothes that aren't form-fitting or flashy. Such identities are presented by famous artists in Jamaica.

When men and women are constantly reinforcing rules amongst each other this is considering policing gender. Policing is the act of keeping others in check and making sure that they do not act out of character. Men and women who display homosexual behavior opposite gender qualities can be met with outrage and public shaming. The scrutinization of people who are not considered to be suitable is a way of defining how far the barriers of normalcy can stretch before it goes to undesirable territories for the community. What I am looking for in these interviews are defined collective values over time and if this is going through a process of changing. The existence or lack of reinforcement of gender roles within my interviewees'

² *"In particular, correct heterosexual masculine and feminine behavior constitutes gender regimes that often lie at the core of ethnic cultures. Our women (often depicted as virgins, mothers, pure) v. their women (sluts, whores, soiled). Our men (virile, strong, brave) v. their men (degenerate, weak, cowardly). These heteronormative ethnosexual stereotypes are nearly universal depictions of self and other as one gazes inside and across virtually any ethnic boundary. Because of the common importance of proper gender role and sexual behavior to ethnic community honor and respectability, a great deal of attention is paid to the sexual demeanor of group members (by outsiders and insiders) in inspection is paid to the sexual demeanor of group members."* (Nagel 113)

experience will be an important factor to look for because I will be able to identify if there is a possibility that Jamaicans are still critical of the gay and lesbian community.

Methodology

My interviewees were either in Jamaica or outside of the country (COVID situation had to be considered), I used three options in order to contact my participants: Zoom (an online app resource that is used for video communications), and Whatsapp (an app mostly used for calling people in different countries) and phone calls. The duration of the interview is meant to last approximately an hour and thirty minutes. But for the most part, they did not exceed that amount of time. My interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions. I recorded my interviews, using the recording feature from any of the platforms listed above. After the interviews were done, I downloaded the recordings to my laptop, and then I deleted the video from the chat.

To get a secure amount of participants, I utilized a snowball sampling method. Since I was working through Facebook groups the best way to gain as much information as possible for my research was to work with the connections of my current participants. Snowball sampling is a method that relies on utilizing current test subjects for recruiting more test subjects from their network. This opens up room for more insight to be received so that I can come up with a reasonable consensus about the gay and lesbian experiences on the island. I wanted to interview around fifteen people because this will help me get to my goal faster and I would have been able to gain more insight from multiple participants and their communities but I was only able to interview six people for my research.

For my study, my participants must identify as cis-gendered gay and lesbian people. If I were to do a study on the entire LGBTQ community this would cause many difficulties for many reasons. First off, the required amount of participants I would need have to be large enough for

me to gain experiences that would help me to conclude each category of the LGBTQ community, by focusing on both the lesbian and gay community, I can focus on the experiences of those who identify with being attracted to the same sex. The only difference is that I will be working with people who identify as either cis-gendered men and cis-gendered women so that I can make my population much more specific without having to encounter entirely different experiences. This reduces the pool of interviews that I will have but the participants mustn't be completely different from each other. If I were to study people who identify as transgender, asexual, or any other identity within the LGBTQ community this may risk me having completely different experiences and risk my data for this project is either skewed or inefficient for me to come to an overall conclusion. I would also like to mention that since this is a small study, of only a handful of homosexual Jamaicans, my findings will not be representative of the entire Jamaican population and should only be seen as experiences that are from my participants.

The benefits of using the Facebook group are that it is informal and there is easy access to people who are connected to my topic. Facebook groups are filled with people who share something in common within that community, ranging from identity to passions, and this made it possible for the likelihood of meeting a participant to be high. The need to gain permission from someone in a higher position was also not necessary because the Facebook groups are open to anyone who wishes to join. Despite that being the case I still asked if I can post a flier so that anyone who sees it can respond. A downfall that I noticed about using Facebook groups is that I did not gain enough participants because people either disregarded my post or did not see it at all. No one was obligated to participate or interact with my post.

For the participants that I was able to receive, I asked them if they knew someone who would be willing to be interviewed for my senior project. To properly introduce myself and make myself more welcoming my message went as follows: Hi Everyone! My name is Kai Hutton and I am a senior at Bard College, studying Sociology. I am conducting confidential interviews for my Senior Thesis on the experiences of gay and lesbian people in Jamaica.

If you or someone you know is interested in participating in my research please comment under this message or send me a Facebook message. From there we can proceed to schedule the interview. Thank you everyone for your time!

I interviewed a total of six people. Five were men and I had only one woman. If I was able to gain more women for my project I would have been able to have been able to find patterns of possible differences or similarities among homosexual women and men. Martin is 25 years old and he is soft-spoken and presents a timid personality but tried to be as open as possible when sharing his story. He completed some college and currently works for a telecommunications company and is currently living in Jamaica. Don is a 25-year-old man, a college graduate, and currently works as a business manager and currently lives in the United States. He is calm and for the most part, seemed to be an easy-going person. Randy is 29 years old and works as a home health aide and completed college. He currently lives in Canada. Randy enjoys having a good laugh, is highly opinionated, and is highly energetic. During our interview, he expressed great joy in being able to share his story. Terri is a 26-year-old college student living in Jamaica. During our interview, I noticed that he is someone who takes time to think about his experiences and tries to thoroughly understand his community. Michelle was the only woman that I was able to interview for my project. She is 37 years old and is a sales

representative living in Jamaica. Michelle expressed that she wanted to help me with my studies and was willing to answer any questions that I had. She was straightforward and observed the world taking on a more holistic approach so that she did not show any biases. My last interviewee was Martin, a 23-year-old college student and works as a project manager on his campus. While interviewing him I noticed that he is someone that is heavily involved with activism for gay rights and this will likely influence his responses to my questions because he knows LGBTQ history and societal behavior surrounding normalcy, heteronormativity, and discrimination.

Risks & Mitigation

The potential risks of participation are the possibility of having feelings of emotional discomfort when talking about personal histories. The second possible risk is damage to a person's reputation if their participation in the study becomes known because being gay can be stigmatized in Jamaica and it is possible that some people may not be out about their sexuality. Participants will be warned that I do not have a legal right to withhold my interview recordings and notes if they are subpoenaed in a court of law. There are no potential benefits for the participants, other than contributing to social scientific understanding.

To avoid the risk of emotional discomfort, I will remind participants that they can skip any questions if they seem uncomfortable and that they can leave the study. Lastly, hotlines will be provided for those who wish to seek support. If they are in Jamaica they can contact J-FLAG (an organization for the LGBTQ community) for human resources at 876-875-2328, and Quality of

Citizenship can be contacted at 876-317-2227 and also provide information on any LGBTQ resources within the area that the participant currently resides in.

In order to reduce the risk of damage to the participant's reputation, I assigned pseudonyms and maintained confidentiality. The pseudonym is used throughout my entire senior project to maintain confidentiality. Throughout the process of using snowball sampling, I did not tell anyone who recommended them that I contact them. I conducted all my interviews in a private location where no one can hear the interview. I let my participants choose an interview time they prefer so that they can find privacy.

To protect the confidentiality of the information disclosed by my interviewees, here are the steps that I followed: If the participants choose to participate in this project, I will assign them a pseudonym that I will use in all my writing/records. Pseudonyms will also be used to replace the names of institutions that they are associated with throughout the project. Any identifying details the participant desires to conceal will be concealed. Once the interview has been conducted, I will immediately download the recordings to my password-protected computer, and delete the recording from the platform. When using phone calls the audio will be recorded on a voice recording feature and deleted after being transcribed onto paper. I will maintain the recordings on my password-protected computer until the completion of the project and then will delete them. I will only transcribe the recordings in my room and keep the notebook.

Cultural Impacts: Homophobia As A Culture?

For my study, I wanted to gain a better sense of the climate in Jamaica so I asked questions regarding three factors that I believe impact a community. I wanted to address religion in Jamaica because religion is a social institution that often brings the community together and has an expansive population; I found out that many of my participants came from Christian households. My focus then turned to politics because leadership and laws can influence how a majority of people are treating social issues and what leaders see as important situations to focus on compared to what they believe are not necessary to change for the better. Lastly, because dancehall music is extremely popular and was birthed on the island, I wanted to learn more about the messages they are conveying and how artists can influence Jamaican citizens. In this chapter, I want to give an overview of these three aspects of Jamaica along with some thoughts that my participants gave to me during our interview.

Religion

Homosexuality was condemned during the British colonial period in Jamaica due to Christian sermons stressing the importance of homosexuality being considered morally wrong according to the bible.³ Thus because Christian practices are focused on defining moral and immoral acts according to God's demands, the point of view on the gay and lesbian community was not likely to change for the better. Since Jamaica's overall population is Christian this would be a shared perception amongst the majority. Religion was at the forefront of how the participants were able to define the communities they were in but also the flaws that came with it.

³ Charles, Christopher AD. "Representations of homosexuality in Jamaica." *Social and Economic Studies* (2011): 3-29. (See page 10)

Don explains that there are so many churches and everyone claims that they are Christian. When mentioning sin he stated that “Only in some aspects, like some things are totally wrong. But some things that should be wrong, are acceptable, you know, stealing. Well, that's a crime. You know, killing, murdering, like the crime rate in Jamaica is extremely high. And yet still, they claim to be a Christian country. doesn't make sense, but it's just the way it is”. So it seems as though a problem that he is indicating is the fact that there is an issue of practicing what good Christian values and the faultiness of how the functionality of the society is because of this. This issue then brought up a concern of how sin is being compared to each other. With this concern in mind, I gained another connection to Don's statement from Michelle.

When asking Michelle about religion being a factor in homophobia she stated that Jamaicans love to quote the Bible. She then continued to say “and what they don't understand is that everyone sin everything spelled one word, S I N, sin. So if you're a thief, you sin, if you're a lesbian, you sin. if you commit adultery, you sin, and none of them, ways bigger than the other.” Like Don, Michelle also claims that there is a problem with how sin is being treated in her country. While all sins are expected to be treated and seen as equal to each other, that is not the case in this situation. Homosexuality is considered a sin but as Michelle and Don's statements have presented, Homosexuality will be seen as a greater sin compared to other sins that are being committed at high rates but yet there is not much being done to change that. Based on both participants, Christianity is an important part of Jamaicans defining themselves as a country. But, it seems as though the major issue at hand is that the citizens are not practicing their Christian values in a way that is accurate to the teachings and expectations of what a Christian person

would be. While they are treating homophobia as a sin in a harsh manner they are not doing the same for other sins.

Politics

_____ During my interview with Randy, I asked him if the government in Jamaica is interested in protecting his rights and he immediately declined the fact that this could be a possibility. He then goes on to say “They're not interested, they say it, you'll see it in the paper that said, oh, we're for all Jamaicans. It is just a cop-out response. They're really not. There are no anti-discrimination laws.” When Randy made this statement he said it in such a way that made it seem as though the question I asked could never be answered positively. The same goes for many of my other participants. Martin also quickly denied that possibility because from what he believes people in the gay community are dying and nothing is being done about this happening. He compares the killing of gay people to the killing of an animal; it seems as though the life of gay people has been reduced to a level that is not considered deserving of humanity and compassion. He then added, “There is no justice, no there is no justice. You will actually see a gay person get beaten like in broad daylight and police would be there and nothing happens”. Lastly, Martin recalls that there was a time when the government tried to legalize homosexuality but Jamaican citizens heavily disapproved of this happening. So, along with having a government that does not work hard for influencing human rights, homophobia is so engraved in the citizens that is near impossible for gay people to be protected under the law.

Both Randy and Martin are indicating that there is no enforcement of human rights for the gay community and that the people in Jamaica have no interest in doing anything to protect this community from harm. In my interview with Don even he included that if the government

wanted to enforce a law prohibiting acts of discrimination towards the gay community, then they would have done it. Michelle on the other hand says that like regular people, you will have those in the government who are interested in the rights of gay people, and then you will have those that do not have an interest in their rights at all. Michelle took a much more holistic approach to the question by noticing that there are possibilities of having people in high government positions that will disagree with each other and have their own individual mindsets amongst one another. Denise on the other hand believed that the government was not for the people at all and it does not matter if people identify as gay, straight, or anything else for that matter. Denise then continues that since this is the case “There is no push to remove those laws that can imprison gay men if they're caught in the act and add these new laws to help stop the bullying and the oppression of gay people.” Even though I was able to understand where they were coming from I wanted to delve deeper into what the government was doing other than being nonchalant about gay people simply existing in Jamaica. A breaking point for my curiosity happened when Randy brought to my attention that buggery laws still exist.

Buggery laws are laws that are considered crimes of sexual acts. These sexual acts are deemed immoral and involve oral sex, anal sex bestiality. This law reinforces heterosexuality as a form of normalcy. The buggery law is proof that religion holds power over many aspects of society ranging from home life to the justice system. Britain being a highly Christian society focuses on behavioral expectations influenced by religious morality. Since Jamaica was a colony of Britain at the time, it also adopted these laws.⁴ Religion and law during the colonial period

⁴ *Britain exported its views about sexual immorality to its Jamaican colony (LaFont 2001). The English Buggery Law of 1553 outlawing anal intercourse carried the death penalty, and this law had the support of the Church of England (LaFont 2001). British religious law and doctrine of the 17th and 18th centuries framed sodomy as wicked and sinful (Charles 8)*

have greatly impacted Jamaica's values on sexuality. After years of Britain ruling over the island, its inhabitants will be conditioned to have a particular set of morals. This will then be passed on from generation to generation, establishing a society of people who will have a history of homophobia running through its people.

Based on the information on the human and dignity trust website there are three sections of the "Offences Against The Person Act of 1864" that criminalizes sex between men. Section 76 states that men who commit buggery will be imprisoned for ten years and this could also include doing hard labor. Section 77 of the act, mentions that attempting to commit buggery or an indecent assault on a man will lead to imprisonment of up to seven years with hard work. Lastly, in section 76, gross acts of indecency amongst men or the procurement (agreement to obtaining) such acts are punishable by up to two years along with the possibility of hard labor. These laws in particular focus on crimes in particular against men. Gay or lesbian identifying people were criminalized for their identity because they were not allowed to express sexual desires and this was a heavy risk for them having a large possibility of being punished. Religion and lawfulness seemed to have a connection with each other to punish sinful acts. This all started with the buggery laws of 1533. Buggery laws are still present in the Jamaican legal system. Since this was a tactic that Britain used to maintain authority over the island for many years, the country did not have the chance to reform it because it was present for many generations.

Randy explained to me that these laws are still existent because people have this belief that Britain has "lost its way" so they must be the country to upkeep these rules. In some way, this means that Jamaican citizens feel this sense of duty to keep reinforcing heterosexuality because it is a righteous path that was meant to be followed. While homosexuality is seen as a

horrible sin to be committed, heterosexuality is seen as righteous and normal. But for Randy, this idea of not losing their way is just a way of fostering hate towards LGBTQ people in the country and these people who have such an ideology “don’t know God” meaning that they have no connection with him and instead just want to target queer people.

When I asked Terri about the government wanting to protect his rights he had a different perspective compared to everyone else. He believes that there is a possibility that they want to protect his rights along with many other people but unfortunately they are not at that point in the country. Instead of focusing on what the government should do to change this, he turned his focus to Jamaican citizens as a whole, hinting at the issue of gender expression by saying “We’ll have to change the whole ideology and thinking. The whole masculinity versus femininity thing”. When he introduced this I realized that the issue not only connected to sexuality but also had dealt with gendered expectations. Men and women are expected to behave in a way that indicates that defines their gender and it would seem that men desiring women and women desiring men would indicate that they are properly performing their gender, but also physical behavior is also paid attention to when focusing on gender roles. Expectations of how gender and sexual desire to their place in Dancehall music as artists continuously send messages to the people on the island through their music.

Music

The artist who began dancehall music is known as King Yellowman. His music was considered “slack”, which is another of saying vulgar, erotic, or indecent because it contained highly sexual lyrics and this did receive backlash. Despite all the backlash that he has gotten for his songs he was certain that he should maintain the nature of dancehall music and ensured that

people know that his songs are presentations of his reality. Since many of his songs that he has produced are filled with political and erotic lyrics, many dancehall artists adopted his style thus influencing the future of dancehall music for the many years to come. Today we have influential Jamaican artists such as Buju Banton, Mavado, and Vybz (vibes) Kartel, to name a few, who are also big names in the dancehall world having adopted much of the slack lyrics within their songs. This genre had become so popular that it found its way outside of the mainstream Jamaican music scene to international heights, playing in multiple countries.

Despite the genre being highly popular within the Jamaican community, there are major issues surrounding negativity against the gay community. Lyrics are flooded with the promotion of heterosexual sex and relationships but also have a problem with showcasing discriminatory messages towards people who identify as homosexual, especially homosexual men. First, it is important to take a look into what the lyrics are and the certain vocabulary that is used.⁵ Terms such as “batty boy”, “batty man”, “chichi man” all are used in Jamaica to refer to a gay or effeminate man; these terms are synonymous with the Western term faggot or, for short, fag.

“Boom Bye Bye” by Buju Banton is one of those songs that is drenched in homophobic messages and uses Jamaican slurs to associate homosexual men with breaking norms of gender and sexual behavior. The main verses of the song are filled with slurs and the implication of violence. The lyrics are:

“Boom bye bye

Inna batty bwoy head

⁵ Jarret Brown explains that Batty man is an identity that is created to be the opposite of correct male sexuality. This term is used as a way of defining what a man should not be and is an essential part how Jamaican identity is constructed. BROWN, JARRET. “Masculinity and Dancehall.” *Caribbean Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1999, pp. 1–16.

Rude bwoy no promote no nasty man

Dem haffi dead” - Buju Banton

The verses translate to “Shoot bye-bye, in the faggots head, tough boy doesn’t promote nasty men, they have to die”. Along with the motive of degrading gay men the song does praise women and heterosexual interactions by stating “Woman is di greatest thing God ever put pon di land” (women are the greatest gift that God has given to the earth). Many male artists like Buju Banton make it a priority to make people aware of their sexual interest by stating how much they are interested in women. By doing this they are sending a message that Jamaican men have to perform a rigorous form of masculinity which makes men believe that Jamaican masculinity, according to these artists must be hypersexual, violent, and have a big ego about their manhood. This sense of pride in being a Jamaican man is what causes men to want to continue practicing this explicit form of masculinity.

Another song that plays into this narrative of masculinity is a song called “Nuttin No Go So” by an artist named Notch. This song can be considered a rulebook for mens’ behavior and even the constant use of the phrase “nuttin no go so” is a way of expressing that any incorrect ideas and behaviors should be denied because they are false. The point of this song is to upkeep masculinity by teaching men how to not have sex with men, how to view the body of women, how to treat friendships, and so on. The song immediately begins with a message against homosexuality by stating: “From yuh never lay with another man inna bed, Tell dem mi seh, nuttin no go so”. Yet again the message is immediate and straightforward about homosexuality. He also stresses that men should find a woman to mate with by saying “And yuh never build yuh shoulder muscle with yuh third leg, Tell dem mi seh, nuttin no go so” which is telling men to

stop masturbating and have a woman to fulfill their needs. This also adds to the issue that women are being used as sexual objects for appeasing sexual needs.

These artists are illustrating heterosexuality, promiscuity, and tough behavior as a distinguishable part of Jamaican men.⁶ While messages of hate are being produced there is a narrative being promoted about how men should present their masculinity and heterosexual identity. Many artists are sending the message of the identity of “bad boy” or “bad man”; a man who has this identity is expected to have multiple women at his disposal for sexual enjoyment, express a rigid sense of toughness, and exuding masculine pride and have no desires to have intimate relationships with other men. A man who is strictly a lover of women, and whose entire persona is filled with dominance is seen as a “real man”, true to the expectations of what a Jamaican man should be.

When interviewing my participants we talked about the musical part of Jamaican culture. I asked this because as someone who grew up on Dancehall music I often did not understand the messages until later in life noticing some of the damaging messages they had towards the gay community but also through some research I also learned that it was given a specific name. Times Magazine once posted an article titled “*The Most Homophobic Place On Earth*”, bringing attention to the overt homophobia and violence towards the gay community in Jamaica.⁷ The use of music in Jamaican culture that is often used to promote this behavior was then titled “Murder music” that was produced by well-known artists.

⁶ Nagel, Joane. “Ethnicity and Sexuality.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 26, 2000, pp. 107–133. (Nagel 113)

⁷ <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1182991,00.html>

Much of the conversations I have had with my participants steered in the direction of dancehall music and the multitude of homophobic messages many of the artists are sending out to their audience. These participants mostly focused on how the music has influenced the minds of the people in Jamaica and the ways it has contributed to the experience of being gay/lesbian in Jamaica. They also talked about how this reinforced heteronormative ideologies about the definition of what a Jamaican man would look and act like. For the most part, the answers were quite similar.

Denise explains to me what the messages are portraying the gay community as within the lyrics that are being made. Denise said to me that “The dancehall music is extremely homophobic, it is using homophobic slurs, it’s saying queer people should be killed, should be murdered in the streets, that we are rapists of women, in an ironic twist. We are the degenerates of society, that we are bad, and we need to be eradicated.” The stigma that the gay community has is being recycled constantly so that they are kept in the position of being seen as deviant. Slurs used are the indicators that this community is not deserving of respect, and such words lessen their chances of being seen as members of Jamaica's society. Slurs, insults, and negative titles all play a factor in how we see deviancy. The confusing part about this quote is that he mentions how homosexual people target women for the means of sexual assault. A reason behind thinking this way is so that it can intensify the perception that homosexuality is deviancy. Although it is absurd and ironic when listening to the lyrics the audience is reacting entirely based on emotion thus to hear specific situations that trouble the morals of a person or people will cause growing concern.

Lastly, he mentions that there is a push for men “To reproduce and continue reproducing with numerous women at a time...And so if you can’t do that you are immediately deemed gay, and thus you are hardly a man in our society.” Being a contributor to society by a means of reproducing also adds to the reinforcing heteronormative ideologies. Therefore the idea of being a contributor to society is to be heterosexual and continue with maintaining the population. But this can also be connected to fatherhood. A man being a father is tied into the ideas of manhood. If a man is not fulfilling duties of what it means to be a man, such as having a relationship with a woman, especially going to the heights of having her bare your child, will invoke concern regarding a man’s sexuality and masculinity.

Don, who currently lives in the country, talks about how dancehall music enforces the expectations of men to be heterosexual and masculine. First off, he says that “Dancehall focuses on straight sex” and that “it shuns homosexuality”. The correlation between both statements is that for heterosexuality to be promoted, artists must degrade and rebuke homosexuality so that men are more likely to participate in heterosexual experiences with the idea that to be heterosexual is to be normal. But within his conversation he does not give a clear reason as to why this is being done but instead states “Being “bad” (being tough) and having a lot of girls & guns - just the culture, that’s how you're supposed to be, to act, that’s what you are supposed to do, you have to have a girl every night, that what makes you a man”. His experience seems to touch on the basis that being a tough man indulging in sexual promiscuity with multiple women is the natural order of things without reason, without question. Thus, to not be able to have the ability to question the reason why “things are the way they are” when focusing on male behavior, there will be little to no room to explore what can also be considered normal for a man other than

heterosexual sex and tough behavior among men. Culture itself will be continuously passed on from generation to generation and expected to be followed, especially for children who are taught how they should fit into a community without room for questioning.

Continuing with the pattern of uplifting heterosexuality while degrading homosexuality, Michelle, a lesbian who currently lives in Jamaica, shared some sentiments, similar to Don, for the mentality of Jamaicans having homophobic values because it is “just the culture”. Michelle seemed to be quite bothered by the fact of how easy it is to influence the minds of people and even states that people do not think for themselves. She mentions how people are quick to support the messages of hate without thinking about what they are doing by stating, “Because you have a man sing a song and it comes against gays and lesbians, you think that it’s okay for you (to also be against lesbian and gays) because you want to jump on the bandwagon with the person that said so”. It could be possible that many of these fans are being lead to be homophobic without truly understanding the effect they are having on the homosexual community. This particular mentality of being a follower that Michelle talks about highlights the dangers of artists having a platform that promotes unjust hate.

These highly favored musical artists have maintained a way to attract their audience. Their pattern of influencing heterosexual interactions and slandering homosexuality is what keeps the audience entertained and supportive of their music. This could be the reason why Michelle is so sure that people do not allow themselves to think freely outside of those providing them with entertainment. The heteronormative lyrics are the catalyst for reinforcing the homophobic ideologies within the fan base and this is what keeps the audience they have come back to their music. They enjoy hearing about masculine men and sexual prowess so much that it

becomes not only part of pop culture but the culture of Jamaican society. This is how certain ideologies become normalized within a community. When the message of the lyrics becomes repetitive in meaning, at some point it will have a relatable quality; people will begin to share common morals and practices.

Amongst all of the participants, there are shared sentiments about how music presents homosexuality to the public with no good intention. Most of the interviewees have stated that homophobia is being influenced by the songs that Jamaicans are listening to. The pattern that is being presented is that an artist will sing about being a proud dominant male figure and thus other men are influenced to fulfill these requirements. While homophobia being added to a song have benefits for an artist's career by establishing a collective norm of male identity; the trade-off is that while success will be at a rise for them, the gay community will experience more hate influence by these messages because the perceptions of men are so narrow that it is near impossible for them to exist on the island peacefully.

During the interviews, no one specifically spoke about how the music had impacted them personally but instead, they criticized the music industry's constant degradation of the queer community. For the most part, many of them answered without hesitation that the musical part of their culture is one of the biggest contributors to the hardships that the gay and lesbian community faces in Jamaica. Their criticism can be considered as an experience of personal feelings because there are people who are willingly attacking their identity. They, as well as many others, are becoming a stigmatized body. Stigmatization is a result of being labeled, stereotyped, separated from the rest of the community, and discriminated against.

In Jamaica, religion, politics, and music are the three main aspects of homophobia being up-kept amongst Jamaican citizens. By constantly reinforcing heterosexuality as a correct form of sexuality to display they are reinforcing heteronormative values. To make sure that the citizens are grounded in heterosexuality, strict boundaries are set to narrow how heterosexual people, especially men, should behave, the mentality they should have about sex, and how they should physically present themselves. My participants made it clear that these three cultural aspects of Jamaica are what make it difficult for them to freely express who they are and instead live fear of what could happen if people found out about their sexuality.

Navigating Prominent Social Institutions: Living in Secret & Fronts

_____ During adolescent years three social institutions are prominent in a person's life. First is the family, which is the first that we are introduced to and know.

When a community is formed, there must also be boundaries for what is acceptable within the population. Boundaries being set will allow a community to identify the people who are seen as the outsider because they are going against their shared rules; this is how the members in the community will hold other members accountable for their behavior, maintaining the social order. Like many different social groups, religion creates a community based on mutual values that the people within that community hold which sets up boundaries that separate them from the other.⁸ To do so, there are specific commands that are expected to be followed if the commands are not followed then the individual is seen as a sinner within the community.

Since many religions have a formed community that means that there is a likelihood of having people labeled as deviants. In this case, the deviant is known as a sinner. The main reason for people being seen as a sinner is because a failure on an individual for not resisting temptation, or in this case sinning, comes off as them having a weak foundation of faith or no faith at all. A sin is a form of deviance and the act of sinning is the act of deviance that makes the individual a deviant with the title of a sinner. Amongst Jamaican religious communities, homosexuality is considered a horrible sin to commit. The reason being is that within religious communities many people tend to focus on the idea that heterosexual partnerships are virtuous while same-sex relationships are viewed as impure. Morals such as these have come from

⁸ Nonetheless, regardless of one's religious orientation, a religious group identity plays an important role in sustaining the cohesive beliefs and group goals. By socially categorising oneself with a specific religious group, in-group norms, values and beliefs provide a structure from which individuals view the 'other.' (Chadee Et.al 12).

teachings and practices based on biblical messages. Since Jamaica has a large number of people who are part of a Christian community these values are likely to be shared and this extends outside of the church and into the common life of the island's citizens. Looking at a more intimate level, people who identify as homosexual, religion tends to be a difficult area of life following their identity, religious upbringing, and family.

In Christian households, all members of the family are likely to have shared faith. While raising kids, parents will pass down their beliefs to their children as a way of maintaining family values and practices that they were taught by their parents. By doing this, religious values will maintain their position in the family and keep the family in the religious community which is a way of maintaining or increasing the population of that community.

Navigating the Family

In the first part of the interview, I delved into the personal lives of the interviewees by talking to them about their families' beliefs on homosexuality and how that has affected them. Understanding relationships with the family is an important factor in measuring the experiences of the gay and lesbian community because depending on the amount of support and acceptance the participants have, this can affect the way they can navigate through their own experiences with homophobia in Jamaica. If an individual is able to have a form of support and acceptance then there will be a possibility that they will have less distress regarding their capability to have a community. But if they do not have this then it is likely that the individual will experience much more stress because of the urgency of trying to find a way to fit in not only with their community but also with the family; this will most likely cause those who identify as gay and lesbian to seek out communities with people who share similarities with them or would be able to accept their

identity. Another factor of pressure is having to maintain secrecy about their sexuality. Along with many of the participants having to worry about protecting themselves in public, they also have to worry about their safety and comfortability in the household.

When I asked the question “What are your family’s views on homosexuality” a trend that I have noticed amongst a majority of my interviewees is that they come from a Christian household. Don, Martin, Randy, Terri, and Denise mentioned that their family is either religious or they are specifically in a Christian household. Along with being in households that are heavily connected to religious faith, the participants were having some difficulty with keeping themselves safe and unnoticed as part of the gay community when they are with their family members. But the only one who did not mention a religious background was Michelle, but she only experienced a slight form of disagreement towards her sexuality.

Don mentions that he and his father do not have a great relationship and made me aware that it has always been that way. He believes that his father suspects that he is a gay man and ever since then his relationship has become a lot worse and as a result, they barely speak to each other. As for his mother, he states that she is affiliated with Christianity so she would most likely be against it. But outside of his relationship with his parents, he has other family members that know about his sexuality. Don expressed that he has family in the U.S. who are more accepting of him compared to his family in Jamaica therefore he can be open about his identity in specific groups within the family. Having a family that understands and accepts who he is, he can have a support system that knows the risk of what could happen if he was outed to his parents. To navigate this social institution Don not only must keep his identity a secret but he also relies on certain members of the family to not support his life. Not only are they aware of Don but they are

also aware of the values of his parents since what they have in common are the family members. Don currently lives in the U.S. with family members who are more accepting of him.

On the other hand, Martin made it clear that his sister is religious and that she speculated about his sexuality, thus she would ask him about it but his response is to deny that he is a gay man. Since there is such a large stigma against the gay community in Jamaica he expects that his sister is going to share those values. He also mentions that he feels guilty about her knowing because of his perception of “ I just feel like I’m doing something bad”. His mother is against homosexuality as he mentions that “I would hear my mom talking about it. (It’s nasty, ungodly, they should die, they should be on fire) When she says those things it just puts me in a sense of fear”. By denying his sexuality to his sister and staying quiet when his mother is showing that she is against the gay community, he is avoiding any conflict in his household.

Like The other participants, Randy also has difficulties with his family because of their religious values. Randy believes that the typical Jamaican parents, including his, believe that homosexuality is a sin, against culture, and that people choose to be homosexual because of this he has not opened up about his sexuality with his parents. During the interview, he recalled an argument between him and his mother that because she would make negative comments about the gay community, and that lead to his mother believing that he wanting to be a woman. Randy never came out to his parents but, his defending the gay community was a factor that influenced his mother’s opinion on his identity. His mother believing that he wants to be a woman is likely because she believes that he is rejecting masculinity and instead choosing femininity.

Denise is also not open to his parents about his sexuality but he is open to his sister. He told me that “She’s still learning new stuff and she does that because she wants to understand me

and what I'm going through." His sister is younger and notices that she is willing to be more open-minded towards his sexuality and also having access to the internet allows her to educate herself on the gay community. Denise can find some source of support in his household through his sister. By being able to have a sister who is open to understanding him as a gay man, he has the opportunity to gain an ally that he can depend on and trust.

Don, Martin, and Randy have similar experiences of having to conceal their identity so that they can protect themselves from their immediate family members' scrutiny. By keeping quiet about their identity the participants can avoid any confrontation that amplifies their risk of being outed or having the possibility to cause them to be punished by their parents. If parents see some form of non-heteronormative behavior or mindset, then this causes the relationship between parent and child to lose its stability. Don and Randy both experienced the risk of having almost exposed their sexuality in their homes and how it inflicts the parent-child relationship.

Don's relationship with his father was originally not as good as he would prefer it to be, but now the relationship has gotten worse with tensions around his sexuality. Martin's relationship with his mother and sister is difficult to navigate. The interrogation by his sister along with his mother's slander makes it difficult for Martin to be open about being his natural self in the household; instead, he has to remain silent on this topic and reject his sexuality so that he does not disappoint his mother and sister. Randy's argument with his mother believes that he is not accepting masculinity. The immediate family is in a position of questioning their sexuality. This leads to issues of trust, expectations and disappointment, and conflicts between morals and beliefs, and having a family member who is not heterosexual. While these participants are

experiencing the struggles of concealing their identity, two participants are open to their families about their sexual identity.

Terri is open to his family about his sexuality. Some family members would wish for him to be safe and others would say that it is his life and there is no reason to dwell and such. But despite being open about his identity some of his family's responses were not always in his favor. In his family, some of his cousins and aunts were more accepting than others. For those who disagreed with his sexuality responses would range from religious condemnation, thinking it is a phase, to not talking about it. During Terri's adolescent years his parents used to argue about how they should raise him since his father believed he was being raised too "soft". He was sent into gay conversion therapy by his father and that caused his mental health to decline. As a result of coping with going to gay conversion therapy, he decided to turn to alcohol to manage his fear and anxiety and even called the liquor bottle a "good friend".

Unlike Terri's situation, Michelle's experience with being out to her family was on the opposite side of the spectrum. Much of the family know about her sexuality and she recalls only two family members being against her identity as a lesbian. During our interview, she talks about how people can accept someone for being gay or lesbian as long as they can be independent: "You see, once you maintain yourself, once you do not run to them for stuff whether it's financial, emotional, or anything like those. They'll figure that maybe you can help them with certain stuff, they'll accept you." You become the black eye if you don't work, you're irresponsible. You live in their house and all of that; that's where the passion (being against homophobia) would come because it would be said that you're living a lifestyle that you can't assist. So once they can depend on you, whether it be financially or physically or anything like

that. They will be okay with it. It becomes a problem when you can't assist yourself or assist anybody around you."

What Michelle presented was a case of perceptions of homosexuality being altered based on individual factors. To put it in simpler terms, Michelle is saying that if a person is considered to be well off and a beneficial member to their family then it is likely that they can be accepted for being themselves. So, it seems as though in order for someone to be able to have room to deviate from norms of the society they must be able to not require dependency on other people. What this introduces is the matter of when deviance can be allowed or not, making perceptions of deviance situational. To not be singled out, or in Michelle's case the black eye of the family, it is important to not be burdensome to the family and since that, itself can be a form of deviance that is added to having deviant sexuality.

For the most part, religion is a major factor for why these individuals experience hardships for identifying as homosexual. Family values are connected to their religious affiliation and thus can influence what they believe is right or wrong and expectations of how to live. This has caused the participants to live in constant fear of the possibility that they might face scrutiny, shame, and guilt from not upholding the expectations of their family values. For some of them to maintain their safety they will maintain secrecy by not talking about homosexuality in their household, or sometimes being selective about who knows, and deny their homosexuality if any suspicion arises.

Keeping their identity a secret will also benefit their relationship with their family because it reduces the risk of not having an unstable or no relationship with them. In other cases, some family members are accepting of them which provides them with a sense of community

and belonging without having to worry about who is turning against them. Therefore secrecy is not always going to be a method that they have to utilize to navigate the family but will instead be situational, dependent on who they can figure out is against homosexuality versus who is not. But while many say that religion is a factor of being homophobic it does not represent the entire family. While many of the participants stated that their family is homophobic as a result of religion, they can have family members that do have religious backgrounds, they may also not be heavily influenced by the values of shaming people who are gay or lesbian.

Navigating the school

Moving on to the next section of the interview, I asked the participants about what their experience in school was like. The school experience was an important factor in understanding how my participants were able to navigate through a social space that is consistent within a large majority of their life. Not only is this a time of building meaningful bonds with people outside of the family but it is also a matter of building a community that suits their needs in some form that such companionship will be able to offer. Most of the participants talked about their experience in high school since that is around the time that they become aware of sexuality and where they fit into the spectrum. Many of their experiences focus on how bullying affected their involvement with school life during that time of their life, how the school staff handled certain situations of bullying that targets students who identify and gay, their methods of dealing with these situations themselves, along with how they were able to manage their friendships.

Amongst my interviewees, the experiences that they had in school were many differences in many cases varying from being in an all-boys school, going to a private school, being bullied to not experiencing bullying at all, and even fights. Their main point of the school experience

was during high school. While some had less to say about their overall experience when it came to being in a community of staff and students along with understating their own identity, most were able to recollect many of the situations during those years and how it shaped their overall idea of how to navigate through the social world and cope with the hardships they came across.

Don and Denise both described how they were of how the boys in their school would react to them being gay. Don went to school in Jamaica until the age of eighteen and mostly hung out with the young women in his school, so they would usually be in the same class or walk around together. He describes having friendships with girls as being easier than having friendships with guys. The reasoning for this was that he is much more comfortable with having girlfriends to be with. He even mentioned, "When you're with a bunch of guys, guys talk about girls. And if you don't comment on it, then it's like, what's the problem with you?". Therefore it is possible that the reason that Don is comfortable with having friendships with girls is that there is no questioning around his sexuality and will find them more relatable compared to being around boys who make it clear that they are heterosexual; since Don is not a heterosexual man so he will not be able to indulge in conversations such as those because he has no shared connection to the particular sexual or romantic interest in women that most of the boys in school have. When seeking out any form of relationship an individual will not only look for comfortability but will find it important to not feel judged or question. Acceptance is connected to being part of a community and in this case, a friend group which leads to feeling comfortable. Don does not expect himself to feel judged by his friend group and so he feels safe with them and seen as a valued member of the group.

At this time Don was already aware of how gay men would be treated by heterosexual men and so he would have to take precautions regarding his behavior in this public setting. Don had a friend that was somewhat close to him and also identified as gay but his friend was more open about his sexuality. As a result, his friend would experience threatening behavior such as “ganging up on him” and being told that he should die. Looking back on the situation Don said that the situations he has seen him in, he would hope not to experience the same thing. Don being less open about his sexuality granted him some form of protection against the types of discrimination that he could have possibly experienced. This is another representation of being selective about who he is open with and who should not know. But that did take an unfortunate turn for him when he mistakenly opened up to someone he believed he could have trusted.

Don had opened up to another boy in his school at the time not expecting him to make it take a turn for the worse. The boy he had told seemed to have been in denial because he assumed that Don was only joking; he then had the realization that Don was being serious. Following that day, everyone in the school found out about Don identifying as gay. Like his friend, Don had experienced the situation that he had hoped not to be in:

“When I got back, it’s like everyone knew, everyone was talking about it. All the guys were planning up something; just to attack me. I didn’t know what they were planning. My group of girlfriends came and told me these guys are trying to do something, you should probably try to get out of school early or get someone to try to come to get you because you don’t want anything to happen.”

By not maintaining his method of secrecy his safety was jeopardized. Seeing as how heterosexual boys in the school react towards gay individuals it would have, he could have ended

up in a horrible situation similar to his friend. Therefore by failing to keep his identity a secret the consequence is that someone exposed who he is and this takes away his control over who he gets to come out to. But, while keeping his identity did not work entirely in his favor, what was able to decrease the intensity of the situation was his friend group. By having this group he was able to rely on them for some form of protection by staying close to them so that they can do their best to maintain his safety. The acceptance of others is what led to him being able to have a strong core group of friends.

Just as much as he feels comfortable with them and who they are, they feel the same way about him. Don told me that they are still close to this day. He also went to counseling to talk about that experience and how it impacted his performance in school. He defined it as a sad and scary time and that he felt terrible. As for the school he claims that they did not do anything to support him or help mend the situation.

Martin who went to school in Jamaica also became a victim of bullying as he remembered he was teased until grade eleven. He recalled a situation that happened to him by telling me: "I remember getting into fights with girls, boys, nothing wasn't done about it. I remember going home with a busted lip, jaw, eye swollen, nose bleeding. They (the school) didn't do anything about it. They would just ask me about it. I would just tell them it's a fight but they don't know the cause of why I was fighting at school". The lack of consequences that existed during Martin's time in high school acted as a catalyst for these types of situations to continue along with Martin's silence. By deciding to claim that they were only fighting means that he wants to keep himself in the closet about his identity so that he would not face any more risk of having everyone know or even the risk of having his parents involved. While this is his

method of handling the situation he would not be able to bring to light the situation of targeted bullying that is happening to queer students. Martin did not get the opportunity to experience a community during his moments in school and mentioned that he did not have friends at that time when he was in high school. So, the only way he could navigate his life in school was by bearing the burden of being bullied by the students alone and say nothing to the school.

Unlike Don, Denise went to an all-boys high school. At that time he was becoming much more aware of his sexuality while also learning that people in Jamaica are adamant about being against the gay community. Denise's experience with being a gay man in a school community also included acts of bullying; some of the acts included having garbage thrown at him and rumors being spread about him. What stood out the most about his experience is that there were students in the queer community who also partake in bullying. He calls the queer community toxic because they are trying to be better than everyone else. He has concluded that they put down everyone else especially those within the gay community because they wanted to protect their own identity.

For the students in the queer community who would be involved in bullying, this could be a mechanism to have a safe position in the school community.⁹ Not only are they being secretive but they are also masking their identity by putting on a specific front. Bullying amongst the boys in the school sets up a hierarchy amongst each other. Heterosexual boys will exert their dominance by bullying those who do not share the same sexuality as them. This correlates to Denise's statement that "There is also such a great push for boys to become proper men in

⁹ Goffman States that "It will be convenient to label as front that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front then is the expressive equipment standard kind intentionally unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (Goffman 22).

society. In their eyes that are to be cis-gendered, heterosexual, masculine, in the most toxic ways possible.” Boys are being influenced to constantly represent the identity of what their community believes to be a proper Jamaican man. Thus a proper man is seen to be a heterosexual man, while an improper man is considered to be anything outside of that nature. Denise himself has not used the method of secrecy and because of this, he was more likely to experience some form of discrimination in high school. Lastly what Denise did not get to experience was a community. His chances of being a victim of bullying were high as a result of not having a strong social group that would be able to lean on for support.

The school also did nothing to better support the students who were experiencing this and instead would remove them from the facility. Denise said that “there were actual people who were outed on the campus, and those people were expelled. They claimed it was for their protection but really they didn’t want them there.” The school did not take into consideration the need for students to be provided with support when they are facing these social challenges. Instead, they also became another factor in the hardships that the students have faced within that setting. The school seemed to not be interested in supporting the students who identify as gay. Since the school decided to do this, this could mean that they are trying to protect their reputation; By weeding out the “improper students” they are maintaining the school’s notion of having proper students. Lastly, Denise mentioned that the school, for the most part, held Christian values and said that it showed when they would start the day with morning devotion, if students did not go the consequence would be that they would have detention or suspension. Denise’s school being of a Christian background does not correlate with the bullying that was being experienced amongst him and the other students but can correlate with the reason why

those who were outed as gay were expelled. The push for boys to be proper men can include being of religious faith. To be a proper man is to express masculine behavior and to be of Christian faith, and by being a person of faith that includes not doing anything beyond the boundaries of the practices and expectations they have on the boys in the school.

The significance of this experience that Denise had presented to me indicates that when deviance becomes known, that is when the individual performing deviant acts are removed from the community. In this case, if the majority of the boys in the school are heterosexual then that would make heterosexuality the norm that the school contains. The strict policing of the schools' reputation is what keeps the boundary of the norm consistent. Therefore by outing students who identify as queer, the bullies are bringing awareness to the hidden deviant individual so that the school can extract those who jeopardize the morals of the school. Unfortunately, the queer students are experiencing scrutiny by their academic community. Those who are expelled will most likely lose a chance in gaining a community within the school since the possibility of making friends in these settings is now less likely to happen.

Don and Denise both experienced situations of having their sexuality put them at risk once they are (unwillingly) out to other people. A similar pattern between both is that once one person knows about their sexuality, it would spread to other people at a fast rate. After people find out about their sexuality that is when they encounter hardships within the community. Therefore the method of secrecy as a way to navigate this setting can at times backfire when they open up to the person. As for how the staff handles the situation, nothing was done for the benefit and protection of the students who identified as gay. The only difference between the two is that Don had a friend group at the time that was built in the school so he does have a form of

community that he can depend on for some form of support. Denise's situation lacked building genuine relationships that he can have as a group that would care for him since queer students would keep their sexuality a secret along with redirecting any possible attention about their sexuality to other students.

Terri's years in high school were also considered distasteful as he says they were "like hell. In Terri's first few years of high school he went to school in Miami, he then went back to Jamaica for the rest of his time in high school. Terri felt as though the bullying got worse when he went back to Jamaica. In this case to overcome the bullying situation that was happening his parents defended him stating that if they do not handle the situation properly then they would sue the school. As a result, they set up security cameras so that they can have better surveillance of the students. Terri followed up with the fact that "they realize they were missing things that involve disciplining and contacting relevant authorities." Unlike most of the participants that are not out about their sexuality to their parents, Terri's parents are very much aware. Therefore by not keeping his identity hidden from them, he was able to have support. Despite his parents being against homosexuality that did not stop them from protecting him by any means necessary. Schools seem to lack enforcing discipline and consequences for this type of behavior.

Terri briefly talked about his time in primary school and said that it was catholic at some point in its existence. Throughout many of my interviews, Terri was the only one who mentioned that he had a teacher that was open about his sexuality, but he was only out to the class. This also indicates that he was not open to the staff and faculty in the school too. Again this represents how secrecy is an important factor in how gay and lesbian people can navigate these social institutions safely without risk. By being open to the class it seems as though the students have a

trusting bond with their teacher to an extent. The teacher felt as though they were able to have an honest relationship with their students but not with any of the adults in the school. But the board did find out about his sexuality. By having the board find out that he was gay his teaching career was put at risk.

Both Denise and Terri came from schools that were established with a form of religious affiliation. Because both schools have taken action in the same way by removing people who are not heterosexual, this can be a result of attachment to religious values along with school reputation. To maintain a particular image that has been established, they remove the individual from the community. By doing this, the risk of damaging a mostly heterosexual environment is considered to be the majority. Communities are built on shared values and perceptions. When deviance comes into a community that is established, what is expected is that there will be some form of outrage because it disrupts the shared expectations of the community. In this case, the schools seemingly have a majority of students who come from religious and heterosexual backgrounds.

Randy was openly gay in his school and he explains that he was a little more effeminate in his younger days. Some of the students in his school will then call him girly, girly boy, and batty boy (a slur used on men who are considered to be gay). But as a way of navigating these situations, he believed that since he had a fun personality “it took a little bit of the pressure off, not a lot, just a little; enough I guess for people to see my jovial side rather than to concentrate on that”. Randy’s personality somehow reduces the amount of attention his sexuality is given because he contributes to the entertainment of other students. By putting on a lively front, Randy

is protecting himself from being mistreated on a larger scale by his classmates and other students.

This mechanism that he is using focuses on pleasing others so that they can have a deliberately constructed perception of him. This correlates to what Michelle mentioned about how perceptions of sexuality amongst a family can vary based on what an individual has to offer to those they are around. By being a contributing member of a community that pleases other people provides some sort of leniency towards the deviant identity. Randy is still in a community where being gay is considered wrong and worth being bullied about, attitudes on sexuality itself are still likely to be the same. But as a person, they are going to enjoy his personality because he makes them feel entertained, he makes them feel pleased by his presence in the school. Randy would have to put on this specific persona every day to continue existing peacefully in the school without having to worry too much about the possibilities of the bullying becoming worse.

Similar to Denise's remarks on queer students partaking in negative actions towards other queer students, Randy added that the students who used to be bullies in high school are now out gay people. It could be possible that those who were doing the bullying in his school, did this to avoid being out because they could also be bullied along with dealing with the pressures of expecting to be straight. This reduces the likelihood that they could be questioned about their identity since they are putting on a specific act to present heterosexuality. Bullies are equated to being rough, asserting dominant energy, and are mistreat queer students to reassert the heterosexual identity.

Out of all of the participants, Michelle was the only one who did not mention being a target of bullying in high school. She was not out as a lesbian but claimed that she expressed

herself to girls that she liked during that time. Since she mentioned that she was not out this could indicate that she was not labeled so there would be no reason for her to be seen as an “other”. If she is labeled as a lesbian she will become a visible deviant which could lead to difficulties that many of the other participants have faced. For her “during those days it was not something that was really in the spotlight like it is now.” Around the time she was in high school, which was around the early 2000s the queer identity was not such a serious topic in Jamaica. For Michelle, it would be a matter of being in the right time to be a queer. She did not have to worry about if someone would target her or if she would be outed. However, even though she did not face any form of othering this does not mean that everyone was able to live freely at that time. Since she was the only person that mentions this means that it is situational, depending on location, time, and community. Since she is the only one that talks about being a lesbian in this regard, it would be impossible to conclude this, since there is no other person who shares this pattern.

Amongst all the participants a pattern that has been identified is that to navigate the social institutions (the family and school community) many of the participants had to be in the closet about their identity while selectively choosing who to come out to. By doing so they are searching for smaller groups to be members of the inside of the larger social institutions they are in that will support them emotionally, and accept them. Since family life is drenched in religious beliefs especially surrounding views on homosexuality as being a sin and being deserving of condemnation, it makes it difficult for them to want to reach out to others within the family. But, despite religious backgrounds existing in the family that does not result in many of the individuals not having family members to feel comfortable opening up to about their sexuality.

Some can come out to their siblings, cousins, and so forth without having to experience discrimination and scrutiny from the family, others could face worse outcomes of being out to their family, like Terri for example who was sent to gay conversion therapy.

Social spaces in the schools also require the same method of navigation. Many of the participants had to reduce the likelihood of being ridiculed by their classmates by keeping their identity a secret for the most part. Being out in school can lead to heavy acts of discrimination through bullying (both physical and verbal) and also can cause community building to be an even more difficult task. In this case, friendships will become essential to the experience of being queer in a highly heteronormative environment because they have a support system readily available in case any situation is likely to arise. Those who commit acts of bullying reenact what they learn from their communities, thus they are aware of morals and values that the adults around them have and will bring those morals and values to places of academia, so schools then become sites for policing gender by heterosexual identifying children. But students who also identify as queer will take part in bullying, reinforcing the fact that straightness is dominant and the right way to be. Queer students who do this are protecting themselves from experiencing bullying because their sexual identity is not being questioned. After all, bullies are already viewed as heterosexual.

The overall ambiguity that these participants are facing of who can know about their sexuality compared to who should not produce this urgency of having to conceal their sexuality by any means while searching for people who are willing to accept them for who they are. Failure to tell the right people can lead to being out without consent, such as Don for example who was exposed by a classmate. Being out will lead to a higher risk of being ostracized and

prone to heavier amounts of bullying situations. In regards to the family, even any form of speculation about their sexuality will have negative effects on the family, relationships can turn bad, communication between members can become worse, and so forth. To safely exist in these social institutions those who are in the queer community must analyze the people, they are surrounded by so that they can choose who they can be completely open and honest towards while evading anyone who would make their sexuality an issue.

Since these methods are being portrayed in their adolescent life they are learning how to survive in other places that they may come into contact with in the future. Since my participants are in their twenties and such much of their life was filled with school experiences. Now that many of them are recently out of school or currently in college I wanted to know how they transitioned from their adolescent years to their adulthood.

Masking and Growing Trees: Facing Discrimination & Building Communities

What I learned from some of my participants is that they are in a position where they must continue to find ways to protect themselves to reduce the risk of facing discrimination in their everyday life as adults. In our day-to-day lives, we are less likely to present every aspect of ourselves. Instead, we present the parts of ourselves to aid us in the roles while concealing specific parts of the self we do not want to be revealed in a given situation (Parkes 1987). By masking their identity they continue to keep who they are a secret when necessary so that any conflict with other people can be avoided. This technique was used by some of my participants as they would put on this mask if they felt as though it would keep them safe from the possibility of facing discrimination. At some points, it would be disregarded if they felt as though they can safely present their sexuality. Masks are similar to fronts in the fact that they are used to present a specific character for defining moments. What I have learned is that like many of the experiences with fronts and gaining community in their school, the methods of masking and finding a community are carried developed in their everyday lives as adults. In this chapter, I will talk about how my participants were able to continue to build communities and maintain a social lifestyle in their adulthood.

Masking

Three of my participants have talked about public life and friendships. Don mentioned that when he lived in Jamaica he would hang out with his friend casually, meaning that he does not have a heightened sense of urgency to use a mask to conceal his sexuality, since people would not suspect anything because it is just two guys being friends. But, When I asked about his friends who identify as straight, Don told me that his friends in Jamaica must not know about

his sexuality. He states “Well, like I said a lot of people don’t know. It’s on a need-to-know basis. If you don’t need to know then you just don’t need to know but here Canada they are more accepting”. But he also mentions that the straight friends that he currently has in Canada are accepting of him. In this case, Don is strategically choosing when to use the mask with two different sets of people, one group will know Don’s sexuality while the other would interact with a masked version of Don, not knowing about his sexuality only left to believe that he is a straight man. Based on Don’s statement it seems as though his friends in Jamaican are more likely to reject him compared to his friends in Canada, thus because he suspects that this is a possibility he will use the mask as a form of protection but also as a way of appealing to his friends' idea of who he is to them.

According to Urbanek, societal conditions force people to put on a mask. It is then suspected that people are not likely to have an authentic individual self but instead people have a character that is “socially shared”. Thus the character that we present to other people will be familiar to them but unaccustomed to us.¹⁰ Like fronts, masks are used to build a character based on the defined space they are in and the people they are around. In this case, the defined spaces that I am noticing are spaces that mainly contain heterosexual people.

The concept of this mask stuck out the most to me when I spoke to Terri and Martin. Both of these participants had brought attention to the specific method of using a mask as a form of survival when having interactions with other people around them. When asked about his social life and how he communicates with his friends, Terri told me that he talks to them openly and they would go to places together. But he then mentioned that there are different classes of

¹⁰URBÁNEK, EDUARD. “ROLES, MASKS AND CHARACTERS: A CONTRIBUTION TO MARX'S IDEA OF THE SOCIAL ROLE.” *Social Research*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1967, pp. 529–562.

homosexuality. Initially, I was confused about this statement until he clarified that there are those who are flamboyant and boisterous while others won't be as noticeable until someone outwardly state that they are gay. He then found the word that he meant to use, straight passing.

Passing is a way of concealing one's own identity with another identity that is common amongst a large group of people.¹¹ To be able to pass for a straight-identifying man gives non-heterosexual men the opportunity to traverse through communities that are predominantly heterosexual, reducing the likelihood of being mistreated within that community. Therefore, gay men who do not exude flamboyant behavior will not be able to be identified for their actual sexuality compared to those who are much more expressive about their sexuality. Again, this is because gay men are seen as flamboyant and feminine; the perception of how gay men are expected to be depicted is narrow.

Martin is the opposite of Don regarding his friendships. Martin realized that he no longer cares about friendships that make him have to hide his true identity because he is already feeling the pressures of hiding his identity from family and people who could be homophobic. For example, if he posts anything that is on the topic of homosexuality they would ask him about his sexuality. He would then respond honestly and state that his friends are not "really doing anything for me" and that "it's okay if they don't want to speak to me anymore". Martin wants to be as authentic as possible with his social life because much of his life he had to keep his sexuality hidden from his family. But without that mask, he has also faced discrimination from

¹¹ Passing should be understood as a form of presentation that can be perceived as an identity that can be perceived as dominant in accordance to the presentation of self that is common in a majority of people. Check Samuels, Ellen. "Passing." *Keywords for Disability Studies*, edited by Rachel Adams et al., NYU Press, 2015, pp. 135–137.

other people. Martin is one of the participants who have failed using the method using a mask and had to face the repercussions of such.

Martin recalls how bad he felt when a manager refused to coach him in his position. According to him, the manager showed visual signs of his being uncomfortable around Martin by keeping his distance, and as a result, the manager found someone else who was willing to help him. He placed heavy emphasis on the fact that the person he found to help him was a woman. While there is no concrete evidence that indicates that he brought a woman to work with him as a sign of being homophobic, it is possible that Martin emphasized this coming from the fact that he believes that he should be able to work with another man regardless of his sexuality and since he is mostly around people who identify as straight, this adds to the fear of having to be discriminated against. Even though this is not the most confrontational situation it was still a form of discrimination since he was initially refused help. Before telling me about the situation he prefaced his experience with the fact that his mannerisms are “dainty”. The use of the word dainty is used to define his actions as non-masculine. By telling me this I believe that he wanted to make me aware of how men with “dainty” behavior are treated in his community keeping in mind that men are expected to portray tough and dominant actions.

His second instance of discrimination also involved straight men and the police but it was highly confrontational compared to the first situation. When Martin was out with his friend one day they were targeted by two men. Even though he wanted to run away his friend needed his help since they were attacking him. The police then got involved but they did not defend Martin and his friend and instead talked down to them saying that they must act like men and “Una for dead” which means you should be dead. What this situation tells me is that those policemen

valued their prejudices rather than the wellbeing of the citizens that they are supposed to be of service to, instead of being in favor of the mentality of the men who were causing them trouble.

Martin again brings up behavioral responses that indicate sexuality and self-presentation being the core of this situation. According to him, his friend is a bit more revealing and wants him to tone it down, telling him “I can’t take the unnecessary attention”. That was in relation to his behavior lacking any form of masculinity that was capable enough to not attract anyone who could be homophobic in the area they were in. His friend could not create a masked identity and there could be many reasons for this. It is possible that he does not want to wear the mask because he wants to be his authentic self despite being around people who would ridicule him for who he is, or he is not as hyper-aware of his actions making it difficult for him to wear the mask. Another reason is that he is possibly unaware of being able to evaluate his surroundings so that he can know when to wear the mask or not.

With these situations, I am reminded of the fact that he believes it is difficult to hide sexuality. Martin is highly aware of how he presents himself and is socially conscious of who he is around and how they might react to knowing about his sexuality. But, Martin would have to be highly aware of what he does for him to put on a masculine front when around other people. If he does not build this skill then he will continuously run into situations being subjected to acts of discrimination. But it seems that some men are highly skilled at utilizing a masked identity to cover up their homosexuality as Randy told me about the gay men who will go the extra mile to embody the character of a heterosexual man that can make their role more believable by marrying women. Since Jamaica mostly displays heteronormative ideologies, the pressures of

being singled out by others as a deviant to the community are at a high because of the unfortunate dangers they could face for not upkeeping those values.

Randy witness many gay men do the unexpected as “They’ll get married to a woman and then do what they want on the side to please society”. In a society where homosexuality is heavily looked down upon, the gay men that Randy mentioned are using a survival tactic that makes their identity discreet, unnoticed to the public eye. By masking their identity through heterosexual marriages, they can avoid being noticed as deviants and this will mitigate the risk of discrimination that they are likely to encounter. They are pleasing society because relationships amongst men and women are highly favored, normal to the society that they are in. To become such a character opposite of who they are but corresponds with the behavior of the majority of the society they live in, is a performance that they must partake in every day.

Like the queer students who bully other queer students to protect themselves from being in the same situation of discrimination, these men are using similar masking tactics which are ways of perpetuating heteronormative values. Randy continues identifying these particular men as self-hating homosexuals and in some ways, it can be true. To grow up in a society that heavily frowns upon homosexuality, men and women who identify with such may develop a form of self-hatred because it is so deeply engraved in their learning from family, friends, and anyone else in their community. They are not necessarily to blame for their self-hatred as it is taught to be wrong to identify as anything other than heterosexual. At times, despite people practicing what they are taught to be as normal, they will have conflicts about what is right and wrong to them. Communities have their own ethos that for the most part, people would follow. Cultural Integrity is established to fit the standards that have been in practice for many years and created a

boundary so that those standards are not affected in any way possible. Therefore anything outside of the boundary that is set by a community will be immoral to that specific community(Erikson 1966).¹² This creates a conflict between being a member of society and valuing their individualism. Based on my research, my interviewees believe that Jamaican people hold strict values on gender and sexuality, setting cultural standards or boundaries because in their eyes everyone should be the same in that regard. Thus people who identify as anything else other than heterosexual are likely to face this conflict.

According to Randy, despite having married women, they can fulfill their own needs. These needs are for homosexual intimacy and companionship that correlates with their true identity. Having this small possibility of an opportunity to be who they are could help with the difficulty of having to be someone they are not. It could even be thought of as a catharsis from a hard day of embodying a character not only for their protection but for the benefit of other people. Having another person that they can go to for an escape from the outside world makes their life feel less distressful considering their circumstances. But by leading this double life they still run the risk of being caught in the act. Being caught in the deviant act while married will cause the moral outrage to become far greater than if they were to be found out without marriage because they are being lied to, betraying the feeling of normalcy that those around them have.

The only person who does not wear the mask is Michelle. She does not embody a different character because she does not care to hide her identity. Michelle describes herself as someone who is not involved with having too many friends but for those that she does have they

¹²Erikson, Kai, 1931-. *Wayward Puritans; a Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York :Wiley, 1966.

would hang out together anywhere. For her, it is better to live as her true self as she tells me “You have people who will pass, see us, screw up their faces, some persons don’t have a problem and some people make it their problem but there’s nothing they can do. They would have their slurs and say whatever but you don’t have to pay them any mind because that’s people in general”. Michelle’s view of how to act in Jamaican society is different from many of the other participants. What her comment tells me is that it is not possible to appeal to all people, so it is best to live in her truth because it makes her feel the most fulfilled. For Michelle, the mask is not a necessity for living in Jamaica, and would prefer not to restrict herself with this method. It seems as though this is the case because Michelle did not have moments where she had to fear for what could happen if people were to find out about her lesbian identity.

As said in the first chapter, she mentions that her family knows about her identity and did not feel as though she had to conceal who she really is. During her time in school, homosexuality was not as important as it is now. Therefore by not having to deal with discrimination on a personal level, this made her feel as though she can live without feeling as though her sexuality is a burden that is meant to be hidden from everyone. Michelle also mentions “In Jamaica, lesbians get away with more things than gays would, they would be quicker to bash men than they would for women”. She further explained that this is because men are interested in having sex with two woman and the ideas surrounding it entices men.¹³

¹³“Patriarchal culture defines ‘normal’ sexuality within the context of male dominance and power. Men are expected to desire and to have women.” (Forbes 49) The author connects patriarchy playing a dominant role in how Jamaican society is centered around appealing men's ideas of manhood thus influencing men's perception of masculinity and correct male behaviour. *Music, media & adolescent sexuality in Jamaica*. Arawak publications, 2010.

During the harsh moments of discrimination that the participants experienced, they found ways to navigate through society with mechanisms of survival. Many of my participants had ways of figuring out how to navigate through social spaces with their identity weighing on their shoulders, finding people to relieve those stresses. One of the forms of building a community that existed was the use of online chat rooms. Being discreet and stealthy is one of the methods that seemed to have worked for them; one way of doing so is by talking to people online. By connecting with other people online Martin and Randy can speak to people who share the same experiences and feelings in a highly private setting; Martin and Randy told me about how they were able to gain some new bonds through the use of social media. Martin uses Facebook and was able to become part of a community through a networking process. He met with someone who is affiliated with one of the few LGBTQ organizations on the island. The person he connected with gave him an opportunity to experience a gay community that can thrive together as out men who can be in public spaces together, providing a feeling of belonging.

Randy has connected with other gay men online. He recalls using Yahoo messenger to contact other gay men and he brought to my attention that the chat room used a specific name so that gay men would know that the chat room is meant for them. The name of the chatroom acts as a code that only gay men can identify so that there would not be any risk of having anyone identify them and the purpose of the chat room. The use of this name acts as a form of security for the group because it is not common knowledge, the name is only familiar to those who are a part of the group. By doing so this specific name is being utilized as this cover-up to keep gay men discreet. Along with using a discreet gay chatroom he also mentioned being able to use a chat section on a radio station platform.

These online conversations seemed to have been the most popular and effective way of building relationships amongst gay men, as it provides anonymity from the outside world. But even though online communication does bring some fulfillment to them in terms of building relationships, this is only the beginning of having relationships grow stronger for them. To feel a more intimate experience meetups will be planned through these online chat rooms. Randy did meet up with people but he wanted to make sure that he was comfortable with doing so because as he said "things happen to people". When hearing this I assumed that these things were acts of violence and the people he is referring to are gay men. He proceeds to tell the unfortunate story of his friend who planned a meet-up with someone he texted online.

Randy's friend was led into a horrible situation with the person who he decided to meet online. Unfortunately, upon entering the site instead of meeting another gay man he was met by a group of straight men. They brutally beat, stabbed, and threw him over a harbor. In this case, the method of utilizing online chats failed his friend.

Online connections do provide the gay community the chance to build bonds amongst each other in discreet ways and without the risk of public confrontation. Martin's experience demonstrates a multi-step process of recruitment that happens in the gay community. Since Martin was young and did not have anyone to connect with within the outside world this was his first opportunity to find people who resonate with him. It began with individual texting, invites to events, and then being affiliated with organizations. But while gay chat rooms are meant for gay men, that does not mean that anyone can't join. Anyone can come in masking their identity to be someone that they are not for malicious purposes. Therefore in terms of security, the use of online chat rooms is not capable of weaving out anyone who is not meant to be in those chat

rooms. Therefore further precautionary measures must be taken by the users to ensure the validity of the individual's identity can be trusted.

The next community-building strategy that I learned about was unique in its process of coming into existence. Denise holds a position working at a resource center on his campus that is meant for the LGBTQ community, but he mentions that the resource center is not common knowledge to the entire campus community. After all, they want to keep the space as safe as possible because they are in a homophobic society. I was unsure of how it was kept secret in a very public place so I asked him about how they were able to communicate with each other despite that circumstance and he gave me some insight into how it came to be. Denise gave me the history of how this resource center came to be. He told me that on campus, there is a place where you can find queer people and they called it the tree because it was a giant tree which was near the humanities building. Queer students would come to socialize with one another and it became a haven for them at the time. He added that they felt comfortable being their open queer selves since it became their territory. Denise then included that if anyone (who did not identify as queer) tried to insert themselves into space they would be the outsiders and not the queer students. The "Tree" became this miniature community that is flourishing within a larger community and has become the home for queer people to feel and be the majority in a space that they can call their own. Denise made me see the "Tree" as a setting where non-heterosexual identities can exist as the norm; anyone who invades their space would immediately be the deviant in their space. This was made clear when he called the tree "our territory".

The "Tree" acts as a stronghold that is grounded in the values of having the queer community exist within their authentic selves without the burden of thinking about the many

possible risks of being marginalized. This was a major stepping stone for Denise and the other queer students on campus because they were building and growing their community together. But as Denise had mentioned, there was still the importance of having a private space for all of the queer students to come together. They transitioned to the resource center which was still on campus but far enough to be in a secluded area. This was their second place on campus to relax, work and above all be safe. I was under the impression that Denise had started this initiative but it began way before he made it onto the campus. He believed that it started at least fifteen years ago; a few queer people on campus noticed that queer students on campus needed a space, thus it began as a small club in a classroom. The space that the resource center currently exists in was first rented at that time.

During this part of the interview, Denise continuously brought up that the resource center was placed in an area far away from the main area of the campus. For him, what is most important about having a space for the members is the ability to stay protected at all costs. Since he views Jamaica as extremely homophobic this, along with the people who began building this community, made this their first priority. As a result, the community grew exceptionally well as it gained more people who felt welcomed by the location. The use of space played an important role in the creation of this community because being separated from everyone else allowed the community to develop on its own without any impacts from outside of the queer community. Another factor that played into the growth of this community was persistence and time. The students had a vision of what they wanted for people who can relate to them and continued building from there. Fifteen years of creating a space that is a resource was a large amount of time to attract many queer students giving what was at first a small club longevity in the process.

The community is still present to this day but unfortunately, the space is currently not in use. I asked Denise about the physical space and he told me that due to the COVID-19 pandemic they had to close the facility especially since it was small. They have switched to being active virtually. He explained that they would have zoom calls, movie nights, and other events to keep everyone active. He also stated that they created a group chat room for everyone on WhatsApp so that everyone can still have a community during the pandemic. Denise is quite ecstatic about the resource center and the “Tree” is a sign of the importance of having a community that is well established. The feeling that he presented made me realize that since it is difficult to truly have a community with other people who do not identify themselves with the same sexuality as him, these locations are what was needed for him to have a sense of belonging.

Community building amongst the participants is very much sought after because of the need to feel connected with other people. Many of the participants feel as though they are the outsiders in their community that they are currently living in. Therefore building this new community, being online or in person, has helped them to not feel isolated by their own sexual identity. Randy was able to find comfort in the use of these gay chatrooms, and despite having to not being in a physical community he was able to find joy in being able to have these online communications and eventually meet with other gay men when he felt more comfortable and sure about his safety. Martin was able to experience a gay community by starting with online communication. He was found by someone who wanted to extend the resource that he had to other gay men, thus Martin was found online and now able to be part of the LGBTQ center as a member who would go to events. Like Martin, Denise has felt the warmth of being able to have a physical space to connect with other people who share the same desire to have a palace that the

queer community can officially call their own. These communities are the tree for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual. They are connected by the roots, which is having a shared identity and desire, to form connections and grow to its fullest potential.

The participants have implemented strategic ways of surviving homophobia in their everyday life and found communities through a process of social connections. To maintain their safety and encounter less discrimination some of the participants will put on a mask, hiding their true identity with another identity that they naturally do not have. This mask that they use will cover the gay identity by having a persona that fulfills the gendered expectations of how a man should present his masculinity. In this case, since gay men are tied to concepts of flamboyant and feminine behavior the male participants had to act as the opposite of that behavioral pattern. The mask embodies the heteronormative values that some of the participants' communities would value. But by building their own communities that make homosexuality the norm they can reveal the sexual identity that their other communities would often shame.

Building community with other gay people gives the participants the space to be their authentic selves. These communities were built from online chat rooms to having physical spaces needed for a population to grow and have a concrete setting to call their own. Many people in the gay community are constantly looking for other people to connect with on an intimate level but also as a way of finding new members to join organizations so that they can grow as a community that can flourish without the need of the outside world. They are given a chance to be valued for the growth of a community growing to its fullest potential, such as a tree that needs all of its parts to flourish.

Conclusion

One of the questions that I asked my participants was, what do you want Jamaica to know about the gay community? They all shared sentiments of wanting to be seen as human and are deserving of being treated equally. That no matter what they will all continue to exist and that they should not be killed for being who they are in and they can be beneficial contributing members to society as much as people who are heterosexual. Throughout my research process, I have learned that my participants have to navigate through the communities that they are in because of their sexuality. Religious beliefs seem to be the main reason why most participants face conflicts with their sexual identities and being surrounded by multiple social institutions that do not support their sexuality. Since Religious people on the island find homosexuality to be an identity that should be condemned this leads to the stereotyping, discrimination and even criminalization of those with that identity.

Surrounding human rights politics, Buggery laws still exist in Jamaica criminalizing Jamaican men for having same-sex sexual relations with each other and will sentence them up to ten years in college or more with hard labor. These laws have yet to be repealed and there is no evidence of laws being created in the process to protect gay rights. As for pop culture in Jamaica, dancehall music is the biggest representation of heteronormative values as many artists create music that focuses on promoting a distinct form of Jamaican masculinity. Many of the male artists influence men to be tough, only desiring women and taking pride in their manhood, but while doing so they also influence people to discriminate against the homosexual community and will promote violence against them. These three aspects have shown themselves in the personal lives of these participants from family life, school experiences, and adulthood.

From adolescents to adulthood my participants had to navigate through social institutions where they felt unsafe about expressing their sexuality. Participants that came from a religious household had to keep their sexuality a secret from their loved ones because they could risk having a damaged relationship with them. Because some family members have shown that they are not pleased by homosexual identities this would further cause the participants to be more fearful of the possible outcomes of scrutiny and shaming. While in school they have to stay in the closet to avoid bullying by others. Those who partook in bullying activity would do this to protect themselves because they also wanted to hide their identity, so by bullying other students they were creating this idea that they are heterosexual because only gay students are seen as individuals who should be targeted. Throughout their journey, they have constantly worked on building meaningful relationships. These relationships began as small support groups of family members and friends who did judge them based on their sexuality and instead accepted them for who they are. Thus meaningful relationships are essential for being able to navigate their societies. Some participants were able to be part of organizations that have a steady and growing amount of people to be part of the community, creating spaces that give queer people the ability to strive and be exist together celebrating and enjoying the feeling of belonging.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. First I want to ask a few questions about your background:
 - a. What is your age?
 - b. The last level of education you completed?
 - c. What is your occupation?
 - d. What are/were your parent's occupations?
 - e. Where did/do you live in Jamaica?
 - i. Where do you live now?
2. What are your family's values on sexuality?
 - a. What do you think shapes your family's value on sexuality?
 - b. Does your family know you are gay/lesbian?
 - i. What was it like coming out to them?
3. What was your experience in school like?
 - a. How does/did your school handle bullying amongst gay/lesbian students?
4. Do you socialize with those who are also gay or lesbian?
 - a. How do you all communicate with each other? (In secret, public, online?)
5. Tell me about the gay community in Jamaica.
6. If any of your friends identify as straight are they accepting of same-sex relationships?
7. Do you feel comfortable being gay/lesbian in :
 - a. School
 - b. Public
 - c. With family
 - d. With friends
8. Have you ever felt unsafe expressing your identity? Please explain when/where/why.
9. Do you think that the law or the government is interested in protecting your rights? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that your community is becoming or will become more accepting of homosexuality?
 - a. What makes you think this?
11. What would you want Jamaican society to know about the gay/lesbian community in Jamaica?
12. How do you think being gay/lesbian shaped the course of your life?