



Understanding Young Queer Adults' Experience of Accepting Queer Identities and Appearance Management

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The research objective was to understand young queer adults' experiences of accepting their queer identity and appearance management. The life course approach was used for research framework to understand how young queer adults' appearance changes in the transitioning time of life. The life course perspective describes an individual's life interacting with the sequence of significant life changes (e.g., marital status, parenthood) (Wethington, 2005). Adolescence period and entry into adulthood are one of most important transitions ("trajectories") in life (Wethington, 2005).

Potential participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Participants who self-identified as LGBTQ sexual identity and their queer identity was known to their family members and/or friends were invited to the study. A phenomenological interviewing method (Van Manen, 1997) was used to understand how queer young adults managed their appearance as they were exploring and accepting their queer identities. Phenomenology is to deeply understand the meaning of our everyday experiences in pre-reflective or pre-conceptually. Interviews were semi-constructed, tape-recorded, and last for up to two hours.

Texts came from six phenomenological interviews were analyzed following Van Manen's thematic analysis approach (1997). The phenomenological approach encourages interviewees to tell their experiences as a form of story. Anecdotes allow the uncovering of hidden meanings and understanding of their lived experiences. The narratives were transcribed, analyzed, and grouped together by essential themes as they emerged from the researcher's reflections on them.

The sample included six young adults who self-identified as gay and lesbian. Their age ranged from 20 to 28. All interviewees indicated a degree of struggles of exploring and especially disclosing their sexual identities to others. One interviewee described that,

"I knew I was gay...but really not sure how to represent that or to deal with that...because I wasn't being accepted for it...like I couldn't wear what I wanted to because I wasn't comfortable enough showing [who I was]..."

Managing appearance was closely related to a process of accepting their sexual identity and communicating the identity with others. One gay interviewee described that by saying,

“...[I] wore my ruffles to prom...kind of like testing to see...*is it okay to be like this*...and since I didn't really face too much negativity...I would push it a little bit further ...eventually...able to say okay, this is who I am.”

A major transition associated with breaks in trajectories refers to “turning point”, which is a decision point about future paths (Wethington, 2005). When exposed to reference group in the queer community, most interviewees shared that it motivated them to be more confident with trying out what they really want to wear. One interviewee said, “..I didn't want to be seen as like a feminine gay male so I tried not to dress like one....[I] met other gay men...because they dress like...they are happy..” This experience made the interviewee take down of traditional norms of what is okay to wear “freeing” himself from.

While queer identities were tested and explored, young queer adults tended to experiment with clothing reflecting their queer identities. As interviewees' queer identity more established, they became more confident with what they wore. Once interviewees reached a point that they were fully embracing their queer identity, they were free to try out expressing who they are. Some were not afraid of wearing clothing that directly reflect their queer identity and others simply expressed their fashion taste in clothing regardless of queer identity.

Reference

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Wethington, E. (2005). An overview of the life course perspective: implications for health and nutrition. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 37, 115-120.