

### ***WRITER'S NOTE***

*The purpose of this paper is to delve into the correlation between one's identity, childhood, and how society influences an individual.*

*This series of personal narratives, poems, and essays illustrate in no particular order, experiences, discussions, and thoughts labeled with the time and place in which they were stated and or experienced by the individuals discussed in this paper.*

## NEEDY BEES [CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE]

How does one's childhood upbringing influence the rest of their lives? From birth, whether or not a child is genetically male or female, the societal norms of the United States expect that new parents raise their newborn according to societal standards. How a child is raised can be influenced by economic status, race, citizenship status, sexual orientation, physical appearance, etc. Since most human brains continue developing until the age of 25<sup>1</sup>, from birth until well after their teenage years, their environment can and is critical for the steady development of an individual.

Through these years, things are learned, milestones are crossed, in most instances, there is exponential growth, among other things that tend to happen in the early years of life. Specifically, for children and adolescents that identify as LGBTQ+, their upbringing especially affects their relationship with family, and importantly, their relationship with themselves.



### FAMILY

The definition of what family is can be and is drastically different for everyone. Families can be chosen or given for anybody. By definition (given) family is any group of persons closely related by blood<sup>2</sup>; a basic unit in society traditionally

consisting of two parents rearing their children<sup>3</sup>. In comparison, chosen families are people that you tend to care about and consider *family*<sup>4</sup> i.e. close friends. Both types of families play a huge role in anyone's life, but especially for LGBTQ+ youth, having a supportive family regardless of biology is essential. Not having the support of those closest to you can be harmful and can negatively affect one's perception and relationship with family. Non-accepting families have been proven to result in negative outcomes with only 24% of LGBTQ youth can “definitely” be themselves as an LGBTQ+ person at home and 67% of LGBTQ+ youth hear their families make negative comments about LGBTQ people<sup>5</sup>. Negative results of being an LGBTQ+ person in an unsupportive family include but is not limited to verbal harassment, disownment, the forcing of conversion therapy, among many other potential outcomes. Conversion therapy can include several dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing an individual's

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<sup>1</sup> Child Mind Institute, Inc. 2017 *Children's Mental Health Report*. 2017, [adaa.org/sites/default/files/2017-CMHR-PDF.pdf](http://adaa.org/sites/default/files/2017-CMHR-PDF.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> “Families.” *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, [www.dictionary.com/browse/families](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/families).

<sup>3</sup> “Family.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/family](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/family).

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “LGBTQ Inclusive Family Diversity Definitions: Welcoming Schools.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.welcomingschools.org/resources/definitions/family-diversity-definitions/](http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/definitions/family-diversity-definitions/).

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth Report.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

sexual orientation or gender identity<sup>6</sup>. *Reparative therapy* often results in physical changes, as well as drastically different mindsets. Conversion therapists use a variety of shaming, emotionally traumatic or physically painful stimuli to make their victims associate those stimuli with their LGBTQ identities<sup>7</sup>. According to studies by the UCLA Williams Institute, more than 700,000 LGBTQ people have been subjected to the horrors of conversion therapy, and an estimated 80,000 LGBTQ youth will experience this unprofessional conduct in coming years, often at the insistence of well-intentioned but misinformed parents or caretakers<sup>8</sup>. The difference between supportive versus unsupportive families is the impact that they make in the present moment and to a LGBTQ+ individuals future.

### ONESELF

Through early childhood development we begin to grasp who we are as individuals and childhood experiences influence our futures heavily. Even though everyone develops at different rates, from age four until around age twelve are critical years that enrich the ability to understand complex concepts and the world around them<sup>9</sup>. For LGBTQ+ youth, these years are especially important because through childhood and adolescence this is when emotional development starts to materialize. In regard to the relationship between youth, sexual orientation and gender identity, the awareness of such concepts start to become more understood. Many LGBTQ+ youth that are either outed or choose to come out, 75% of youth in 2018 sample rate coming out as LGBTQ to their parents as extremely stressful<sup>10</sup>. Coming out can either make or break an individual's wellbeing and it is essential for there to be the necessary resources for such a monumental experience.



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<sup>6</sup> “About Conversion Therapy.” *The Trevor Project*, [www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/50-bills-50-states/about-conversion-therapy/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/50-bills-50-states/about-conversion-therapy/).

<sup>7</sup> “About Conversion Therapy.” *The Trevor Project*, [www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/50-bills-50-states/about-conversion-therapy/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-involved/trevor-advocacy/50-bills-50-states/about-conversion-therapy/).

<sup>8</sup> Mallory, Christy, et al. “Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth.” *Conversion Therapy and LGBT Youth PDF*, The Williams Institute UCLA School of Law, Jan. 2018, [williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Conversion-Therapy-LGBT-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf](http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Conversion-Therapy-LGBT-Youth-Jan-2018.pdf).

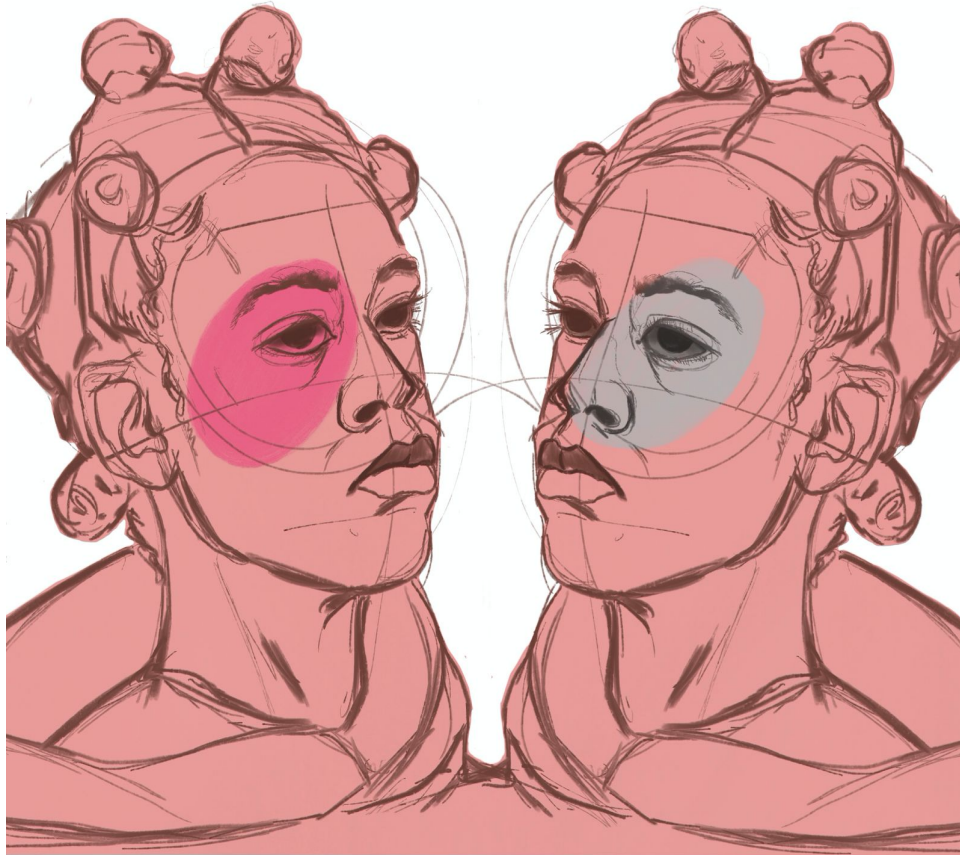
<sup>9</sup> “Child Development: Ages and Stages.” *CHOC Children's*, [www.choc.org/primary-care/ages-stages/#4-5-years](http://www.choc.org/primary-care/ages-stages/#4-5-years).

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth Report.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

## SWEET CHERRY [FEMININITY]

### FEMININITY AS A CONCEPT

The idea of what is considered to be feminine and who can be feminine is different from person to person. Can women only be feminine? What if I'm not feminine enough? If a man wants to do or express something that is traditionally feminine, can he not do that at all? Femininity is having qualities or characteristics traditionally thought



to be typical or suitable for women<sup>11</sup>. Across different cultures and various societies, considering one thing to be feminine versus another thing can be vastly different because of history, learned behaviors, and more. These characteristics and expectations have been developed substantially over time and in the United States there has been much progress but there is still much that is needed to be done. To question femininity, you have to

dive into the issues that affect 21st century women and individuals that express themselves as feminine. Societal expectations like gender roles and physical appearance are still very common matters that feminine individuals and women face.

### GENDER ROLES

What is the definition of gender roles? How are female identifying people affected by gender roles?

Gender roles in context of society means the way that we are expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex<sup>12</sup>. Gender role expectations differ by one's ethnic, societal, and or

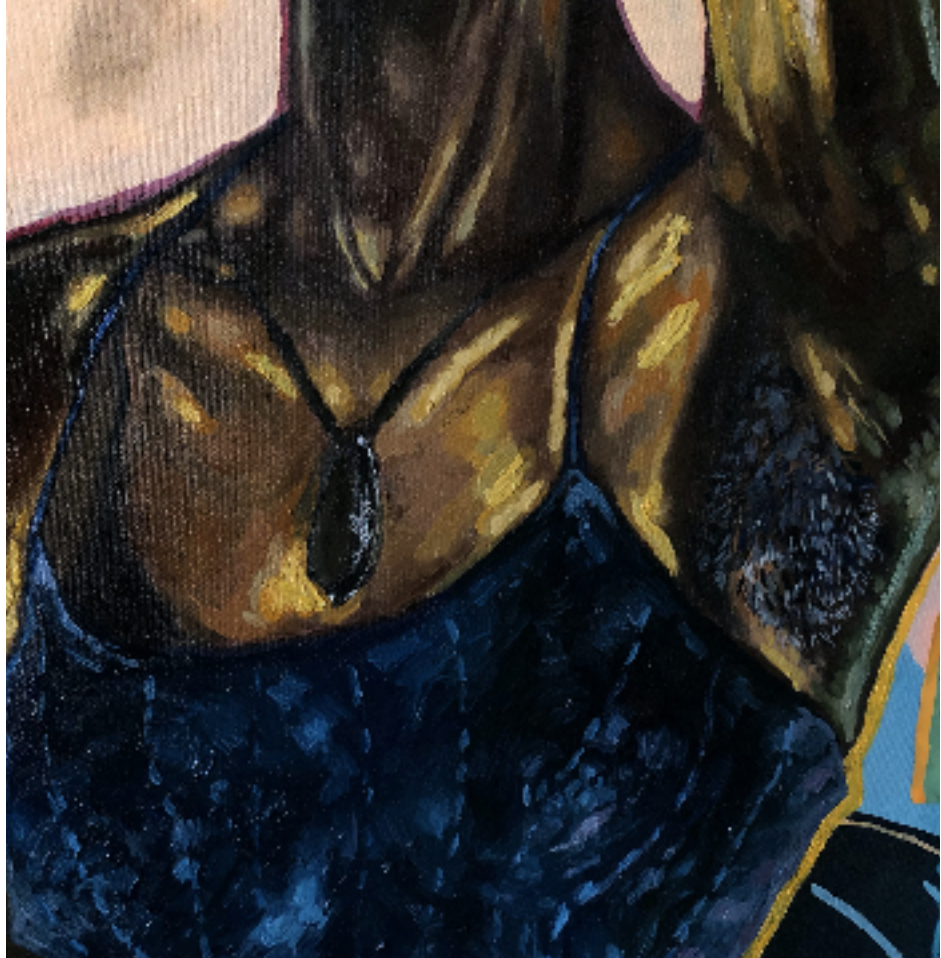
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<sup>11</sup> "FEMININITY: Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *FEMININITY | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/femininity.

<sup>12</sup> Parenthood, Planned. "Gender Identity & Roles: Feminine Traits & Stereotypes." *Planned Parenthood*, www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity/what-are-gender-roles-and-stereotypes.

cultural group and also overtime the expectations of *males* versus *females* change according to the time period. Due to the development of gender roles, gender stereotypes have become widely accepted and tolerated. Stereotypes about gender like personality traits, domestic traits, occupations, and physical appearance<sup>13</sup> can result in sexism<sup>14</sup>.

These gender stereotypes affect female identifying people because more often than not, *hyperfemininity* is believed to be the *ideal* qualities of what it means to be feminine. Hyperfemininity portrays false ideas of femininity and end up making the relationship between femininity and an individual difficult. For instance, the acceptance of feminine gender stereotypes results in feminine people believing that they can not do or express certain *non-feminine* attributes like having body hair, being aggressive, having short hair, being a child-bearer<sup>15</sup>. Overall, when it comes to feminine gender roles, extreme societal expectations and gender stereotypes do not benefit any female individual and can be detrimental to their wellbeing, relationships with people and themselves, and how they generally live in a society.



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<sup>13</sup> Parenthood, Planned. "Gender Identity & Roles: Feminine Traits & Stereotypes." *Planned Parenthood*, [www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity/what-are-gender-roles-and-stereotypes](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sexual-orientation-gender/gender-gender-identity/what-are-gender-roles-and-stereotypes).

<sup>14</sup> Behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.

"Sexism." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexism).

<sup>15</sup> Child-Bearing: of or relating to the process of conceiving, being pregnant, and giving birth to children.

"Childbearing." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/childbearing](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/childbearing).

## THEIR PEACHES, THEIR BANANAS [NON-BINARY DEVELOPMENT]

Non-binary | “An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do<sup>16</sup>.” As a society, we believe that individuals are either born strictly male or strictly female; what if a child or an adult realizes that they



don't fit within the *gender binary*? Yes, genetically there are differences between the functions and general anatomy of a penis versus a vagina, reproductive systems, and even down to how metabolisms are processed and the different risks each body is genetically susceptible to. No, gender expression and biological sex are not the same things; gender expression and biological sex are separate, but can overlap. The biological differences between the sexes *male* and *female*, should not determine or label an individual as someone that they believe they are not. In the United States societal system, *non-binary* and *gender expansive* individuals inherently are predisposed to forms of discrimination regarding their gender identity, specifically concerning their preferred pronouns and the relation between their gender expression and sexual orientation.

### GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

Gender identity is how [an] individual perceive themselves and what they call themselves; one's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth<sup>17</sup>. Gender expression is how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender<sup>18</sup>; usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine<sup>19</sup>. Gender expression and gender identity are often seen as going hand and hand together, but they are still very different from one another and how they are thought of and expressed varies from person to person. For

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms](http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms).

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms](http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms).

<sup>18</sup> “Glossary of Terms.” *Stonewall*, 11 Nov. 2019, [www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms).

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms](http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms).

gender-expansive<sup>20</sup> youth, learning about the different types of gender identities and how you can express gender can be very difficult. More recently, the increased visibility of gender-expansive role models in media, film, television and sports, along with trans-inclusive Obama-era policies and legislation, have helped young people to come out and live authentically<sup>21</sup>. Although there has been increased inclusivity in the United States, gender-expansive youth still face the harsh reality of not being able to be themselves, which includes using their bathroom of choice, and how they decide to dress. In 2018, 51% of all gender-expansive youth never use the restroom at school that aligns with their identity and 59% said that they don't feel safe using them<sup>22</sup>. Through the expression of gender, clothing is a main aspect that can make an individual feel like themselves but in most cases, having the choice to express gender how you would like is not an option. For instance, only 31% of all gender-expansive youth can dress and express themselves to match their identity in school<sup>23</sup>. Not only within the school system do gender-expansive youth face issues, the social standards of the United States continue to make it hard for gender-expansive youth to coexist with societal expectations.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's sexual attraction to other people, or lack thereof. Along with romantic orientation, this forms a person's orientation identity<sup>24</sup>. There are various terms of the types of sexual orientations with some that overlap with similarities to ones that are vastly different from each other. Throughout history the development and number of these terms have grown substantially and more and more people are feeling comfortable identifying and aligning with such sexual orientations. In the United States we have come a long way from heteronormative biases and beliefs, but there are still the instance of non-heteronormative intolerances. From a national survey in 2016, it was reported that there are approximately 1.3 million kids (roughly 8%) of all students in America, that report [having a sexual orientation other than heterosexual]<sup>25</sup>. Although there is a considerable amount of non-heterosexual teens in the United States, this does not mean that said teens have come out<sup>26</sup> or live openly. The coming out process to disclose your gender identity and or your sexual orientation widely differs from person to person. In some cases there is acceptance with love and support, but in contrast, a person might receive disapproval, intolerance, hatred, among other things. Studies have shown that outness usually brings more positive outcomes, including higher self esteem and lower anxiety and depression; in negative outcomes they [most likely have to] manage their identity<sup>27</sup>. To *manage* your identity is to constantly evaluate and decide in which environments and scenarios one is safe to selectively share information about their LGBTQ identity. Discussions about sexual orientations are happening now more than ever and will hopefully continue to be talked about in the coming years.

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<sup>20</sup> Flexible range of gender identity and/or expression then typically associated with the binary gender system. Human Rights Campaign. "Glossary of Terms." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms](http://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms).

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 Gender-Expansive Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report).

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 Gender-Expansive Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report).

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 Gender-Expansive Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report).

<sup>24</sup> "Glossary of Terms." *Stonewall*, 11 Nov. 2019, [www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms).

<sup>25</sup> Schlanger, Zoë "A Teen Health Survey Crucial to US Public Policy Is Finally Asking about Sexual Orientation." *Quartz*, Quartz, 26 June 2017, [qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/](http://qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/).

<sup>26</sup> When a person first tells someone/others about their orientation and/or gender identity.

"Glossary of Terms." *Stonewall*, 11 Nov. 2019, [www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms).

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

## PRONOUNS

Words used to refer to people's gender in conversation<sup>28</sup>; a word used that refers to either the people talking or someone or something that is being talked about<sup>29</sup>. Over time, a person learns and discovers who they are, who they want to be, which includes how they want to be addressed. For many people, pronouns are of the most importance because this allows them to feel one with themselves and labeled how they want to be labeled. In contrast, for some, Pronouns are not of any significance for various reasons like not wanting to label themselves or for the sake of remaining ambiguous. Although this may be the case for some, only 18% of all gender-expansive youth are always called their correct pronouns at school; only 36% of gender-expansive youth and 45% of non-binary youth say that they are always called by their true [dead-name<sup>30</sup>] name at school<sup>31</sup>. When an individual is not called by their name of preference they can gain the feeling of the lack of belonging and lack of acceptance. As a society, we can stop these feelings from ever occurring by being more inclusive, socially aware, and address discriminatory actions against LGBTQ+ individuals and social minority groups as a whole.



## HONEY, IT'S OK TO CRY [RACISM AND HOMOPHOBIA]

Racism is the belief that an individual race is the primary elite of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race<sup>32</sup>. Homophobia is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or

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<sup>28</sup> "Glossary of Terms." *Stonewall*, 11 Nov. 2019, [www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms).

<sup>29</sup> Medina, Matteo. "Preferred Gender Pronouns: For Faculty (Or, How to Take Important Steps in Becoming a Trans Ally!)." *CCSU*, Hampshire College, [www.ccsu.edu/lgbt/files/PreferredGenderPronounsForFaculty.pdf](http://www.ccsu.edu/lgbt/files/PreferredGenderPronounsForFaculty.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> The name that a [LGBTQ+] person was given at birth and no longer uses.

"Deadname." *Merriam-Webster*,

[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deadname](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deadname).

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 Gender-Expansive Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-gender-expansive-youth-report).

<sup>32</sup> "Racism." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism).



discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals<sup>33</sup>. Globally, there is racism and homophobia in its various degrees and often racism and homophobia coexist together. The LGBTQ+ community has its own way of categorizing the different types of sexual identities, and gender identities; within that, people that “belong” in the LGBTQ+ community are either oppressed by being told that they fall into a certain stereotype or they become the oppressor by controlling how other people can and should identify, how they act and why. Racial groups such as blacks, whites, Asians, Hispanics, and etc. have cultural characteristics that define who these groups are, their differences, and their similarities. The correlation between these two social minority groups is that an individual can face isolation, discrimination, and often also, physical and emotional harassment from both groups simultaneously.



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### ISOLATIONISM

Isolation can be intentional, unintentional, for better and for worse. To be in *isolation* is to be in “complete separation from others and the state of being isolated<sup>34</sup>”. Those that are or do identify as a member of a minority community often face *isolation* from other members within their own community. At the same time, being a member of certain communities is not an option because of societal expectations, for instance, even if a person is biologically African-American, that does not mean that they should automatically be pressured into believing and or acting upon the morals of the Black community. Additionally, if someone acts or appears to be *gay*, this does not mean that they align themselves with suggested beliefs or even that they are in fact a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Being in such communities can help those that seek validation, create a desired feeling of self-confidence, and etc. But what if you are rejected by a community that you thought you belonged in? In any social group, being told that

you are not the typical embodiment of what is expected, or that you are too much of this or too much of that can be very harsh and painful. In the United States, LGBTQ+ “people of color experience homophobia within their ethnic communities, as well as racism within LGBTQ+ communities and, [are] often pressured to choose one identity over another<sup>35</sup>.” The feelings of having to choose and the feeling of rejection is one of the leading causes of stress for

<sup>33</sup> “Homophobia.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia).

<sup>34</sup> “Isolation.” *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, [www.dictionary.com/browse/isolation](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/isolation).

<sup>35</sup> Díaz, R M, et al. “The Impact of Homophobia, Poverty, and Racism on the Mental Health of Gay and Bisexual Latino Men: Findings from 3 US Cities.” *American Journal of Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2001, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1446470/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1446470/).

people of color that identify as LGBTQ+ due to the fact that most LGBTQ+ “people of color typically find it important to be apart of a community of some sort<sup>36</sup>.” Often the way to overcome this *isolation* is to find others that also feel rejected, isolated, or have similar feelings about certain communities that they want to be apart of.

## DISCRIMINATION

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned public discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and was later expanded to bring disabled Americans, the elderly and women in collegiate athletics<sup>37</sup> to its addition. Similarly, in 2019, the Equality Act was passed to reform the Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of the sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition of an individual, as well as because of sex-based stereotypes.<sup>38</sup> Even though these statutes were passed to forbid unlawful discriminatory actions, as expected, there is still inherent social issues like homophobia and racism. The use of derogatory terms and public profiling are types of discrimination that are still very prevalent and are frequently used subconsciously. In the United States, LGBTQ+ youth more often than not, experience verbal threats and are bullied at school. Approximately 70% of LGBTQ+ youth have been bullied at school because of their sexual orientation<sup>39</sup>; similarly, 73% of LGBTQ+ youth have received verbal threats because of their actual or perceived LGBTQ+ identity<sup>40</sup>. Although the youth of today are known to be more aware of what is considered offensive and discriminatory, specifically in the school system, LGBT students [suffer from] persistent patterns of isolation, exclusion, and marginalization that ma[ke] them feel unsafe or unwelcome at school; [additionally] students described hearing slurs, lacking resources relevant to their experience, being discouraged from having same-sex relationships, and being regularly misgendered<sup>41</sup>. Overall, the relationship between Americans, racial groups, and the LGBTQ+ community, have historically been strained and currently, over the past five years, the comfortability between Americans and these minority communities have been fluctuating year to year.

## HARASSMENT

LGBTQ+ youth can be and are at an increased risk of verbal harassment and physical harassment like sexual violence. In most instances, LGBTQ+ youth, especially those of color, suffer from the lack of resources, [available], familial support, [as

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Szymanski, Dawn M., and Mi Ra Sung. “Minority 1P7 - Dawn M. Szymanski, Mi Ra Sung, 2010.” *SAGE Journ* journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011000010366167?c

<sup>36</sup> Lehavot, et al. “Redefining the American Quilt: Bisexual Women, Journal of Community Psychology.” *Deep*. www.deepdyve.com/lp/wiley/redefining-the-american-quilt-d

Jamil, et al. “Sexual and Ethnic Identity Developn Adolescents.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psycho*

<sup>37</sup> History.com Editors, History.com Edi Networks, 4 Jan. 2010, www.history.com/topics/

<sup>38</sup> Cicilline, and David N. “Text - H.R.5 - 116th C www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5/text/eh.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report.

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Yout www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report.

<sup>41</sup> ““Like Walking Through a Hailstorm”: Discrim www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/07/walking-through-hailstorm/c



well as] community support<sup>42</sup>. In the United States, 11% of LGBTQ youth report that they have been sexually attacked or raped because of their actual or assumed LGBTQ identity<sup>43</sup>. Physical harassment is especially harmful to the development of an individual and such experiences can influence ones behavioral interactions, social and self awareness, and mental health, in addition to other things. Since most youth are in a school system, safe places at school would be at the most access; in 2018, 26% of LGBTQ youth reported that they feel safe in the classroom; 27% of LGBTQ youth can “definitely be themselves in school<sup>44</sup>. In terms of dealing with and overcoming harassment, in any social community, having a safe place to support individuals that have been faced with such tribulations, can help lessen the chance of future distress.

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<sup>42</sup>Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth Report.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth Report.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Campaign. “2018 LGBTQ Youth Report.” *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

## OH NO! A BANANA SPLIT! [MASCULINITY]

### MASCULINITY AS A CONCEPT

Masculinity [are] characteristics that are traditionally thought to be typical of or suitable for men<sup>45</sup>. Can men only be masculine? What does it mean to be man enough? Why are women judged if they want to do or express something that is traditionally masculine? The acceptance of these expectations have developed substantially over time and in the United States there has been too much tolerance of them. Across different cultures and various societies, considering one thing to be masculine versus another thing can be vastly different because of history, learned behaviors, and more. To question masculinity, you have to analyze the history of men and individuals that

express themselves as masculine. Social environments influence the idea of what is considered masculine; matters like toxic masculinity and male gender roles are still far to prevalent issues that tend to be acceptable by men in the 21st century.



### TOXIC MASCULINITY

What is toxic masculinity? Why is toxic masculinity an issue? Toxic masculinity is a cultural concept of manliness that glorifies stoicism, strength, virility, and dominance, and that is socially maladaptive or harmful to mental health<sup>46</sup>. In the United States, recently more and more people are questioning the validity of the *exaggeration* of what it means *to be a real man* and masculine. Certain movements like the #MeToo movement<sup>47</sup> have put the problems with hypermasculinity into the spotlight and also has allowed conversations to start regarding other cultural issues that stem from toxic masculinity. The problem with toxic masculinity which can be a type of hypermasculinity, is what it teaches young boys, how it affects LGBTQ+ and female identifying individuals, and also how society is affected as a whole. For young boys, if they are taught from a young age exaggerated masculine behaviors, then there

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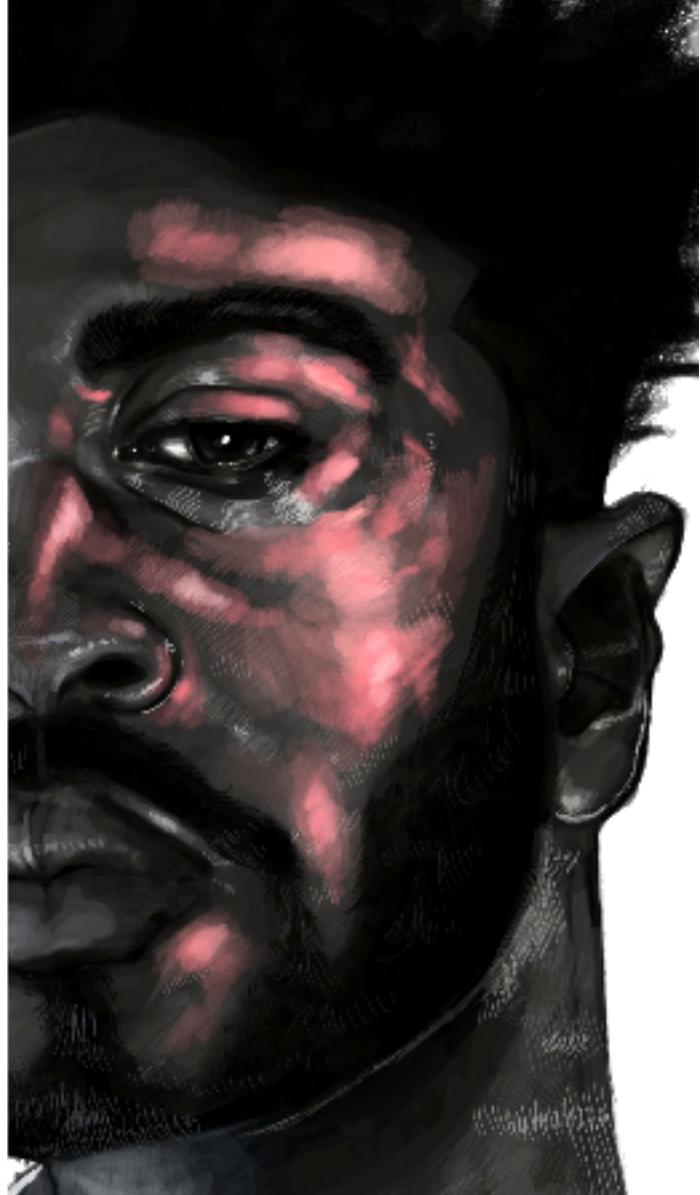
<sup>45</sup> “MASCULINITY: Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *MASCULINITY | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/masculinity](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/masculinity).

<sup>46</sup> “Toxic Masculinity.” *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, [www.dictionary.com/browse/toxic-masculinity](https://www.dictionary.com/browse/toxic-masculinity).

<sup>47</sup> The ‘me too.’ movement was founded to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing.

“About.” *Me Too Movement*, [metoomvmt.org/about/](https://metoomvmt.org/about/).

is a high risk that how they are as men in the future is a result of their childhood and upbringing. The type of male figures in a young boys life plays a pivotal role in a mans overall character; by helping young men and boys understand that they don't have to conform to archaic aggressive stereotypes of masculinity, we can reduce antisocial behaviour, mental health struggles, suicides, gender-based crime and domestic violence<sup>48</sup>. For female identifying people, toxic-masculinity teaches men that their identity hinges on their ability to exert dominance over women, and one common way for men to assert their dominance is through sexual assault and harassment. With masculinity being thought as the polar opposite of femininity, gay men are often associated with being *less than a man*<sup>49</sup> which is where gay slurs like fag and fairy derive from. The effect that hypermasculinity has on society is handled different depending on cultural expectations. Both men, women, and those in between have to deal with the ramifications of what is socially expected from men; these ramifications include *acceptable* violent behavior, negative political climates like false stereotypes, and many more results from a society that tolerates or accepts toxic masculinity.



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<sup>48</sup> Barr, Sabrina. "What Is Toxic Masculinity?" *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 17 Jan. 2019, [www.independent.co.uk/life-style/toxic-masculinity-definition-what-is-boys-men-gillette-ad-behaviour-attitude-girls-women-a8729336.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/toxic-masculinity-definition-what-is-boys-men-gillette-ad-behaviour-attitude-girls-women-a8729336.html).

<sup>49</sup> Weiss, Suzannah. "6 Harmful Effects Of Toxic Masculinity." *Bustle*, [www.bustle.com/articles/143644-6-harmful-effects-of-toxic-masculinity](http://www.bustle.com/articles/143644-6-harmful-effects-of-toxic-masculinity).

## EVERYTHING'S JUST PEACHY [MENTAL HEALTH]

Mental health encompasses one's sanity, stress levels, state of *calm*, emotions, self-awareness, and even the lack of these things. To have *good* mental health, a lot of variables need to be considered; from person to person the state of one's mental health differs due to factors like race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other internal and external forces. Ever since the late 19th century and the 20th century, the psychological study and wellbeing of humans have been heavily considered by Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, and many other notable psychological theorists. In the 21st century, with the rapid development of technology, solutions for better



mental health and stability are at the tips of our fingers. Besides technological advancements, activities like exercise, cooking, meditation, and other hobbies have, in recent years, been noted as easy and accessible ways to keep our mental health in equilibrium. In regard to the state of mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals, even with exponential growth of technology and the acceptance using hobbies to support ones mental health, many people that identify as LGBTQ+ face far too many outward forces like the fear of rejection and lack of social support which can be very detrimental to one's health.

### REJECTION

Facing the burden and or expectation of rejection as someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ often is very emotionally painful and most definitely affects one's mental health in strenuous ways. Rejection is dismissing or refusing of [an] idea<sup>50</sup>. In most instances, LGBTQ+ youth are dismissed because

of their identity, these dismissals include negative verbalizations which can materialize into hurting an individual's mental health. Studies have shown that, compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, LGBTQ youth report much higher rates of depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug use, and lower self-esteem<sup>51</sup>. When our mental health begins to worsen, new internal and external issues start to develop abruptly or over an extended amount of time. Internally our thoughts, subconscious and behaviors can materialize into unfortunate external ramifications. For instance in 2018, 85% of LGBTQ+ youth rate their average stress level as '5' or higher on a 1-10 scale<sup>52</sup> and in 2015, 25% of

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<sup>50</sup> "Rejection." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rejection](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rejection).

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

LGBTQ+ teens in Massachusetts reported attempting suicide versus 5% of [non-LGBTQ+] kids<sup>53</sup>. Additionally, out of 27 states in 2016, almost 30% [of LGBTQ+ students] had attempted suicide, more than four times the rate for straight students, and 60% reported feeling “sad or hopeless,” twice the rate of their straight peers; hard drugs [were used] far more often: 6% reported using heroin at least once, and 5% reported injecting a drug intravenously, which was four and five times the rate among straight kids, respectively<sup>54</sup>. Overall, studies over recent years have proven that the state of mental health for LGBTQ+ youth are still at exceedingly high rates and that there is still a considerable amount of work to be done.

### SUPPORT

The youth of today, especially LGBTQ+ youth need as much support as they can get. Whether support is translated through providing resources, becoming an ally, providing inclusion, or even just being aware and listening to anything that LGBTQ+ youth, living openly or not is going through. The use of supportive counseling and the presence of safe environments have been

noted to lessen the chance of detrimental health problems for LGBTQ+ youth, but in most cases, the youth of today can not get the support that they need. In the United States, Seventy-seven percent of LGBTQ+ youth surveyed report that on average they had felt down or depressed in the past week; only 41 percent had received psychological



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<sup>53</sup>Schlanger, Zoë “A Teen Health Survey Crucial to US Public Policy Is Finally Asking about Sexual Orientation.” *Quartz*, Quartz, 26 June 2017, [qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/](https://qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/).

<sup>54</sup> Schlanger, Zoë “A Teen Health Survey Crucial to US Public Policy Is Finally Asking about Sexual Orientation.” *Quartz*, Quartz, 26 June 2017, [qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/](https://qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/).

<https://qz.com/1014142/a-teen-health-survey-crucial-to-us-public-policy-is-finally-asking-kids-about-their-sexual-orientation/>

or emotional counseling to address these issues in the past 12 months<sup>55</sup>. More specifically, LGBTQ+ youth of color face even more obstacles in acquiring the proper counseling or safe place in comparison to their non-colored counterparts. More often than not, in colored communities, going to therapy as well as identifying as LGBTQ+ is seen as *taboo* and with that there are many stigmas associated with seeking outside help. In regard to LGBTQ+ youth of color these instances are very prevalent often due to their relationship with religion, economic status, and because many parents of color associate getting psychological help as a sign of weakness and that getting help questions their parenting. On average [only] 37 percent of [LGBTQ+ youth of color report] having received psychological or emotional counseling in the past 12 months; youth who had received counseling reported better mental health outcomes<sup>56</sup>. Mainly, there has been a significant amount of studies and research that proves that providing supportive outlets for LGBTQ+ youth is necessary for the overall well-being and development of LGBTQ+ youth, but changes still need to be made for these individuals to have exponential growth.

## CONCLUSION

The series of essays and personal narratives in this paper discussed the overall correlation of how societal expectations influence an individual's childhood, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and their mental

health. The essays were written to give further explanation for why the content in the personal were discussed.



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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).

<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Campaign. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Human Rights Campaign*, [www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report](http://www.hrc.org/resources/2018-lgbtq-youth-report).



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