

“THEY TELL ME FREQUENTLY THAT I’M GOING TO HELL, WHICH IS FINE”:
LGBTQ+ YOUNG ADULTS’ EVALUATIVE RETELLINGS OF EXCLUSIONARY
EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines LGBTQ+ young adults’ evaluative retellings of exclusionary everyday interactions through the frameworks of appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) and the sociocultural linguistic approach to identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). The analysis uses data from five focus groups, during which participants reflected on everyday interactions in which they believed their queerness made them stand out. Appraisal theory is used to characterize how *affect*, *judgment*, and *appreciation* are operative in these reflections, and how strategies of *engagement* and *graduation* further demonstrate how speakers feel about their experiences. Grounded in theories of intersubjective identity construction (e.g., Ochs, 1993; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), this study emphasizes interpersonal interaction as a key site of identity development, foregrounding interactions in which participants sensed that their LGBTQ+ identities were salient. I identify three types of responses to these interactions as reported by participants: *minimization*, *fear*, and *exasperation*. Each response achieves different goals in the moment of exclusion as well as in reflection after the fact, including providing a form of coping mechanism. The attitudes encoded in these reflections demonstrate how participants think and feel about their social worlds, their interlocutors, and themselves. I also argue that the focus group reflections serve as additional sites for participants to reimagine and renegotiate their identity constructions. The study concludes with implications for research on anti-queer microaggressions, as well as guidance for mitigating harm in everyday interactions more broadly.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of my focus group participants, without whose openness and vulnerability, this work would not exist. This is for you.

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic acts that subtly invalidate one's gender or sexual identity are a common feature of daily life for members of the LGBTQ+¹ community. Exclusionary acts range from direct attacks to hardly perceptible micro-communications, like a gesture or shift in tone. The subtlest of these acts might result in a vague sense of dissatisfaction for those who have been excluded, while others may provoke extreme emotional reactions. Such acts can be defined by the term microaggression, a demeaning form of interpersonal communication targeted at members of marginalized communities, which causes harm in minute but palpable ways. Those who have experienced microaggressions sometimes have an acute perception of their exclusionary effects, or they may doubt whether anything exclusionary happened at all. The subtlety of these acts is indeed what makes them so difficult to interpret for those on the receiving end, leading to uncertainty about how to respond. The question of whether and how LGBTQ+ people respond to exclusionary interactions may be answered by any number of influencing factors, including their relationships to and beliefs about their interlocutors, their relative habituation to this sort of interaction, and the discourses circulating about queer people in their social milieu. In examining the ways that LGBTQ+ young adults report responding to exclusionary everyday interactions, this question can begin to be addressed.

In this study, I combine appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005) with a sociocultural linguistic approach to identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) to investigate how LGBTQ+ young adults report responding to exclusionary everyday interactions and to explore what is achieved

¹ For the purposes of this study, LGBTQ+ includes but is not limited to all of the identity labels encapsulated in the acronym LGBTQIAP (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and pansexual), shortened only for convenience. The + indicates that the full range of identities included in the acronym extends beyond the five letters listed. The word "queer" is also used interchangeably with "LGTBQ+" in this study.

discursively by these evaluative retellings. I do this by analyzing reflections from the participants of five LGBTQ+ focus groups, who use evaluative language to recount their experiences of exclusion in everyday interactions. The combined approaches bring to light some of the ways that participants both conceptualize—in the moment—and reconceptualize—later on—their experiences of everyday exclusionary interactions.

The next section provides a brief review of relevant literature to contextualize the study. I explain how sociocultural linguistics and appraisal theory can be used in tandem to analyze the construction of identity within the setting of exclusionary everyday interactions. Then, I describe the methods used, including participant recruitment, data collection and management, and coding. In the analysis that follows, I examine the evaluative language used in participants' reflections to identify three major categories of responses to exclusionary everyday interactions: *minimization*, *fear*, and *exasperation*. The analysis is followed by a discussion of some of the recurring themes, including the influence of discourses of normativity on the exclusionary acts. I conclude by summarizing the main points of this study, its implications, and possible avenues for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociocultural linguistics and intersubjective identity construction

The way that LGBTQ+ people in this study constructed and framed their identities in their reflections on exclusionary everyday interactions is best understood within the framework of the sociocultural linguistic approach to identity construction. Everyday interaction is a key site of identity development. Ochs (1993) demonstrated that it is through interpersonal interactions that we come to understand our own identities and those of others around us. In other words, identity is not constructed in a vacuum. Ochs describes identity as being established through

social acts and stances, which make up all social interactions. The present study explores reflections by LGBTQ+ individuals on exclusionary interactions they have faced in day-to-day life. In reporting and evaluating the way they have been treated, the participants in this study are both recalling ways that their identities have been received by others and also reflecting on how those receptions impacted them and their identities going forward.

As Ochs states, “social identity is not usually explicitly encoded by language but rather is a social meaning that one usually *infers* on the basis of one’s sense of the act and stance meanings encoded by linguistic constructions” (p. 289, emphasis in original). As such, all of the participants in an interaction play key roles in determining the social meaning of identity. For Ochs, identities endure only when they are accepted and acknowledged by others in the interaction; outside of this external ratification, they do not have much significance. The focal point of this argument is that identities do not exist a priori but are actively constructed in the moment: “people are *agents* in the production of their own and others’ social selves” (p. 296, emphasis in original). Ochs’ conceptualization of the intersubjectivity of identity construction has been influential throughout and beyond the field of interactional sociolinguistics. Notably, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) expanded upon this concept by establishing the *sociocultural linguistic approach* to identity construction: one that defines identity as “the social positioning of self and other” (p. 586), and which further foregrounds that how we understand and express our identities is affected by our relationality to some Other. Like that of Ochs, Bucholtz and Hall’s view presents identity as both constructed intersubjectively (rather than independently) and emergent in interaction (rather than fixed). While conversing, speakers selectively reveal aspects of their identities that they wish to either highlight or downplay, and interlocutors have the power to

accept or reject these aspects of identity as they emerge in the interaction. According to this framework, it is precisely in these interactional sites that identity comes to exist.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) further delineate their approach to identity by defining five principles that encompass it: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. The first principle draws on various ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches to identity (e.g., West & Zimmerman, 1987) and is also found in work on language, gender, and sexuality (e.g., Livia & Hall, 1997). This principle states that identity does not pre-exist social interactions; it is a product that emerges in the moment. For queer theorists such as Butler (1990), the emergence principle aligns well with the idea that gender is performative, which is itself an extension of speech act theory (e.g., Austin, 1962). The second principle is positionality, which combines three levels of traditionally recognized notions of identity: macro-level demographic categories, local and culturally specific positions, and temporary roles. Rather than fluctuating between two or more of these levels, identity according to the sociocultural approach can, and often does, simultaneously encompass all three of them. The third principle is indexicality. Speakers do not construct their identities only through the explicit naming of categories and labels; they also use implicatures, stances, evaluations, and other resources to index a connection to a particular persona or group. This point will be particularly useful for the present study, in which evaluation is taken to be a key strategy for positioning the self in relation to other speakers as well as the world at large. The fourth principle is perhaps equally relevant here: relationality. It is this principle that highlights the intersubjective nature of identity—the fact that it is often constructed by relational processes that occur between speakers and their interlocutors in interactions. These relational processes include three sets of opposing pairs: adequation and distinction (i.e., establishing similarities or differences), authentication and

denaturalization (i.e., staking a claim to realness or artifice), and authorization and illegitimation (i.e., asserting authority or illegitimacy). Much like Ochs, Bucholtz and Hall point out that an identity holds up only if it is allowed to by other people. Lastly, the fifth principle is partialness. Based on the various factors that can add to the construction of an identity, it follows that any identity construction is necessarily only a partial representation of a whole person. As Bucholtz and Hall note, identity is thus “constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts” (2005, p. 606). Together, these five principles make up what they have denoted the sociocultural approach to identity construction.

The sociocultural linguistic approach to identity construction provides a useful framework for thinking about gender and sexuality, particularly in a study of LGBTQ+ persons’ reflections of how they have been treated by others. Close attention to how LGBTQ+ individuals talk about themselves, their interlocutors, and their experiences as a whole can provide insight into how they construct their own identities. Sexual identities, just like all other forms of identity, are “the outcome of intersubjectively negotiated practices and ideologies” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 469). When discussing sexual identity in particular, Bucholtz and Hall promote an approach that foregrounds its intersubjective nature because “[on] the one hand, the subject is the agent, the subject OF social processes; on the other, the subject is the patient, subject TO social processes” (p. 493–494). In the present study, participants describe how they have been subject to social processes such as exclusion, while at the same time, they are the subjects of their own narratives, constructing their identities as they tell them. LGBTQ+ individuals may negotiate and renegotiate their identities in moment-by-moment interactions, at times calling attention to their queerness, at times not. The consequence of these negotiations may entail acceptance or rejection

of the identity in question, and this acceptance or rejection might then determine the force of the locution as creating either inclusion or exclusion.

Normativity and anti-queer exclusionary language

In the present study, LGBTQ+ individuals reflect on experiences in which their queer identities have been salient—experiences which may or may not have provoked feelings of exclusion. Studies of language, gender, and sexuality have demonstrated ways in which LGBTQ+ people contend with exclusionary discourses in their speech. In interviews with members of an LGBTQ+ youth group, Jones (2018a) demonstrates how the decision to highlight or downplay one’s queerness appeared to be influenced by the discourses circulating locally about LGBTQ+ people. She found that her participants, who had been regularly subjected to homophobic speech in their small conservative town, discursively constructed their identities in ways that distanced themselves from seeming too different from the (heterosexual) norm. She attributes this process to the locally prevailing discourses of both heteronormativity—by which LGBTQ+ persons are made to feel like outsiders in society—and homonormativity (see Duggan, 2002)—by which LGBTQ+ persons are pressured to attempt to limit their queerness to that which is palatable to the mainstream. Jones’ approach draws heavily on Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach to identity construction; her participants’ use of linguistic resources that seem to intentionally diminish the salience of their sexual identities is a clear example of Bucholtz and Hall’s adequation tactics, in what appears to be an attempt to lessen the perceived abnormality of being queer and avoid being othered. As Jones explains, for young isolated queer people with little if any access to gay-friendly spaces, this was clearly a “survival strategy” (p. 72), but this justification can easily be extended beyond the small rural

community of Jones' study to anyone living in a society organized by heteronormative ideals—which is to say, practically anyone at all.

The growing field of queer linguistics (e.g., Motschenbacher, 2011) provides a framework for understanding constructions of normativity in prevailing discourses of sexual orientation and identity. When LGBTQ+ individuals are regularly faced with queerphobic² language and ideology in their communities, they often formulate and reformulate their identities in ways that respond to these ideologies—some by conforming to them, others by rejecting them. As an example, Queen (2005) shows how LGBTQ+ individuals may partake in the assignment of (typically offensive) stereotypes to fellow LGBTQ+ friends for humoristic effect, as well as for bonding purposes within the marginalized group. Similarly, Jones (e.g., 2011; 2014; 2018b) shows how lesbians in a hiking group incorporate stereotypes in their conversations to both facilitate and constrain lesbian identity construction, ultimately stimulating feelings of both inclusion *and* exclusion. While these examples take place within an amicable context, with both Queen's and Jones' participants developing friendly bonds over these conversations, stereotypes about queer people often have negative effects. Baider (2018), for example, demonstrates that the way queerness is viewed and discussed on online forums is largely influenced by a society's ideologies about family, marriage, and nationality, to the point that anti-queer hate speech is justified by the society's heteronormative ideals. As these examples demonstrate, macro-societal queerphobic discourses surrounding sexual and gender norms are both the sum of and the source of micro-social queer-exclusionary interactions.

Even if explicit queerphobic hate speech has been deemed increasingly socially unacceptable in recent years, queerphobic attitudes remain, manifesting in subtler forms of

² In this study, “queerphobic” is defined as showing prejudice against LGBTQ+ people.

language. Love and Baker (2015) found that the language used in public debates on sexuality-related issues has changed from overt homophobia to more indirect strategies over the past few decades. Although non-LGBTQ+ people can easily identify overtly anti-queer hate speech—shown, for example, in a study by Carnaghi and Maass (2007)—it is likely that these non-queer populations are less keenly attuned to the subtler forms of exclusionary language for which they themselves might be unwittingly responsible. For example, in an institutional environment, Sauntson (2019) shows that LGBTQ+ students in secondary schools understand their classroom environments to be largely queer-exclusionary, often due to their teachers’ perpetuation of heteronormative discourses in everyday linguistic practices. It is often the case that those perpetuating harm via subtle maintenance of the queerphobic status quo do not even know that they are doing so. Discourse analysis by interactional sociolinguists shows that even slight differences in communication style can create a disconnect that feels like, as Tannen (2005) puts it, a rejection of “one’s way of being human” (p. 191). For LGBTQ+ people, whose way of being human is already under sharp scrutiny, the feeling of rejection caused by an unintentionally harmful interaction may be even more acute. The use of language that has an exclusionary effect on queer people remains commonplace, and its effects are real, regardless of intention.

One way to theorize the subtle linguistic acts that leave members of a marginalized group feeling excluded is through the lens of anti-queer microaggressions. Though originally stemming from critical race theory (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991), the theoretical concept of microaggressions has been extended beyond race to include other identity categories that can similarly be the source of subtle discriminatory language. For this study, I use Vaccaro and Koob’s (2018) definition of anti-queer microaggressions as “the commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental forms of discrimination that, regardless of the perpetrator’s intent, disparage and oppress people who

hold minoritized identities of sexuality and gender” (p. 1318). Acts that fall under the umbrella of microaggression include microassaults, microinvalidations, and microinsults, and they can occur in a range of both intimate and institutional settings. What counts as a microaggression can be hard to pin down, but as Wilkes and Speer (2021) state, “microaggression studies place the perceptions of recipients center stage” (p. 304). Such an approach foregrounds the impact of the utterances, rather than the intent that might or might not underlie it. Furthermore, those on the receiving end of a microaggression can choose to engage or not, according to various factors. Nadal et al. (2011) classify possible reactions to microaggressions as being either emotional, behavioral, or cognitive. In sum, how LGBTQ+ people interact with the world, how they perceive their interactions, and how they choose to handle exclusion are all influenced by what they have discerned about gender and sexuality from their surroundings. This is particularly relevant for a study in which participants’ reflections, rather than actual exclusionary conversations, are the object of analysis. My analysis looks not at what was said, but at how participants remember the interaction in hindsight; these retellings incorporate how participants imagine themselves to have been perceived by their interlocutors, which in turn has some bearing on how they presented themselves going forward.

Evaluative language and appraisal

To better understand how LGBTQ+ individuals understand and react to exclusionary language in their everyday interactions, I apply Martin and White’s (2005) *appraisal*³ theory to the data. This is a framework for describing “the language of evaluation” (White, 2015), akin to discursive psychological approaches that treat evaluative and attitudinal language as “performing

³ Throughout this analysis, the first time a term from appraisal theory is used it will be written in italics. All subsequent instances of the term will be written in regular typeface.

actions” (Speer & Potter, 2000), rather than stable facts. Stemming from principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g., Halliday, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999), appraisal theory draws on the idea that “language is a resource for mapping ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning onto one another in virtually every act of communication” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 7). It is described as an “interpersonal system at the level of discourse semantics” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 33); however, evaluation can take place beyond the level of discourse, in the realms of lexicogrammar (e.g., certain lexical items, modal verbs) and phonology (e.g., pitch, volume) as well. Appraisal can be compared to other approaches to evaluation such as stance (e.g., Du Bois, 2007; Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012), modality (e.g., Bybee & Fleischman, 1995), evidentiality (e.g., Chafe & Nichols, 1986), affect (e.g., Ochs & Schiefflen, 1989), and attitudinal and epistemic stance (e.g., Conrad & Biber, 2000). Appraisal shares similarities to each of these theories, but its emphasis is on the Hallidayan approach to interpersonal meaning-making. Martin and White expand this framework to concentrate on the “three axes along which the speaker’s/writer’s intersubjective stance may vary” (p. 1), which are described below.

Appraisal takes a unique approach that examines evaluative language according to three overarching systems, defined as *attitude* (concerned with *affect*, or emotional reactions; *judgment*, or assessments of social behaviors; and *appreciation*, or valuation of processes or phenomena); *engagement* (concerned with strategies for positioning oneself with respect to the source of the stated evaluation, either *monoglossic* or *heteroglossic*); and *graduation* (concerned with the relative intensity of the *force* and *focus* of the evaluation expressed). While I concentrate mostly on attitude in this study, each of the components of appraisal work together and overlap to create a cohesive system for understanding evaluation, and they need not be considered as wholly discrete entities. Within the category of attitude, for instance, judgment can be thought of

as “affect recontextualized to control behavior (what we should and should not do),” and appreciation can be thought of as “affect recontextualized to manage taste (what things are worth)” (Martin, 2003, p. 173–174). Furthermore, one can express a judgment (attitude), while acknowledging the dialogic nature of the judgment (engagement), and simultaneously using intensifiers to strengthen it (graduation). The distinct categories of appraisal merely provide a framework along which to interrogate precisely what kind of evaluation might be taking place when the speaker provides an assessment, including not only how it is established in the utterance, but also how it is “amplified, targeted and sourced” (Martin & White, 2005, p. 9). As a whole, appraisal theory is a useful tool for understanding how participants think and feel about their social worlds.

Oteíza (2017) provides a comprehensive summary of the precise meanings of each of the three systems of appraisal. First, there is the system of attitude, which comprises affect, judgment, and appreciation. Following her classification, the emotional responses of affect can be either negative or positive and are typically grouped into three major subcategories: in/security, dis/satisfaction, and un/happiness. Judgment is divided into social esteem (judgment of normality, capacity, or tenacity) and social sanction (judgment of veracity or propriety). Lastly, appreciation is divided into reactions (how something catches our attention), composition (how balanced or complex something is), and valuation (how worthwhile something is). The second system of appraisal is that of engagement. This approach to evaluation is inspired by the work of Bakhtin (1981) on dialogicality, wherein all language is connected; every utterance harkens back to some prior utterance. Engagement refers to the ways in which speakers position themselves with respect to the origins of the evaluation they express: what is its source? How does it relate to prior utterances? Is it monoglossic or heteroglossic? The third and final system

of appraisal is graduation. Intensifying or diminishing an evaluation’s force and sharpening or softening an evaluation’s focus are the two types of graduation. As Oteíza (2017) adds, there are utterances which “by themselves are not evaluative, but become evaluative because of the action of graduating words” (p. 463). It is thus necessary to look at not only what is said (an attitude expressed, for example), but also how it is said (both in terms of engagement and graduation), to achieve the fullest comprehension of the speaker’s evaluation. See Figure 1 for a visual summary of the basic system of appraisal.

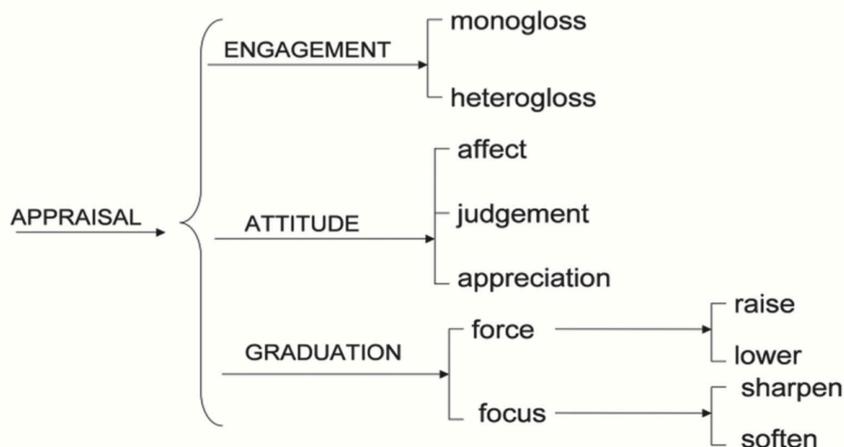


Figure 1. The basic system of appraisal (from Oteíza, 2017, p. 464).

Evaluation, exclusion, and the construction of identity

Integrating all of these conceptual frameworks allows for a unique perspective to understanding how LGBTQ+ individuals experience subtle everyday acts of exclusion and how this affects the construction of their identities. Through examination of the use of evaluative language, appraisal analysis facilitates an understanding of participants’ perceptions of their experiences of “standing out” after the fact. This in turn helps to decipher whether the interaction was or was not exclusionary, and what the potential impacts of these exclusionary experiences might be for the construction of LGBTQ+ identity. Following Speer and Potter (2000), who

attribute their approach to the conversation analytic method, this study centers “the interactants’ perspective” (p. 546) in determining what should count as exclusionary language. Exclusion, like microaggression, is thus defined in terms of impact, rather than intent. Appraisal analysis reveals how “feelings, emotions, attitudes, social relationships and experiences are encoded in language” (Sauntson, 2019, p. 325). As a result, this approach has the potential to shed light on how subtle everyday linguistic acts can affect the participants in an interaction not just in the moment, but in a deeper way that may endure through time. In the context of LGBTQ+ identity construction, Morrish and Sauntson (2007) explain that “appraisal analysis can reveal how sexual identities are constructed as positive or negative, depending on the attitudinal experiences of the narrator” (p. 85). Participants in this study are tasked with describing instances in which their LGBTQ+ identity has made them feel like they “stood out.” When speakers use linguistic resources to evaluate such interactions as either positive or negative, they may be in turn constructing their identities as positive or negative. Appraisal analysis complements the sociocultural linguistic approach to identity construction because it facilitates an attentiveness to how participants experience exclusionary everyday interactions, thus providing a deeper understanding of how the participants view themselves—and present themselves—as actors in the world.

METHODS

The present study uses data collected from a series of focus groups with LGBTQ+ individuals that I conducted in November 2021⁴. My methodology was in part inspired by that of Jones (2018a), an investigation of how LGBTQ+ individuals construct their identities in their descriptions of experiences of homophobia in their local community. Much like Jones, I use LGBTQ+ individuals’ reflections, rather than recordings of actual exclusionary interactions, to

⁴ All procedures in this study received IRB clearance prior to taking place.

learn about their experiences of exclusion in daily life. Jones' study uses group interview data as an object of analysis to better understand the discourses influencing young LGBTQ+ persons' self-perceptions, while my study uses focus group data to understand the range of responses of queer people to exclusionary interactions. The following sections provide details on each of the steps of the process, from recruitment to analysis.

Participants and recruitment

Participants were recruited for this study in September and October 2021. Recruitment strategies consisted of social media distribution, email, and word-of-mouth. I entered both virtual and physical LGBTQ+ spaces, including local university LGBTQ+ centers and DC-based LGBTQ+ community groups, to distribute materials and information about this study. Beyond these avenues, I used my own personal and professional networks to generate a snowball sample, in which my contacts reached out to their own contacts and so on. My parameters for participant recruitment were broad: any English-speaking adult aged 18 to 28⁵ who self-identified as LGBTQ+ could be included. In my recruitment materials, I explained in general terms what the study would entail—namely, a semi-structured group conversation, guided by me, about group members' personal experiences of interactions in which their LGBTQ+ identities felt relevant.

My recruitment yielded 17 participants in total, enough to host 5 separate focus groups, with 3 to 5 participants each. The final participant pool consisted of LGBTQ+ individuals between the ages of 18 and 27, mostly residing throughout the United States, with one participant in Canada⁶. At the time of data collection, the vast majority of participants were

⁵ My recruitment originally targeted people aged 18 to 25, but I expanded the maximum age to 28 during the recruitment period to reach a wider audience. I ended up with participants between the ages of 18 and 27.

⁶ All demographic information was self-reported.

current residents of a major metropolitan area in the U.S. with populations of over 2,000,000 people. The three participants who did not fall into this category were living near a college or university. The racial makeup of the pool was predominantly white, with small percentages of Black, Latinx, and South Asian respondents. Although the focus of the study is on gender and sexuality, many scholars have demonstrated how LGBTQ+ identity is affected by other social identity factors, such as geographic location and social class (Jones, 2018a) or race and ethnicity (Patel, 2019). Given the group’s relative privilege in terms of race and ethnicity, as well as their overall proximity to urban centers—two factors which likely influence their daily encounters in the world—these details are provided to contextualize some of the participants’ experiences.

Because of the study’s focus on queerness, demographic information particularly relevant to gender and sexuality was collected for each participant. Participants were given the freedom to define their gender identity, sexual identity, and pronouns in their own words, due to the complex nature of these questions as well as the vital importance of having participants feel that their identities are represented accurately. The results of these questions are given, for all 17 participants (listed by their pseudonyms) in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender and sexuality demographics.

Pseudonym	Gender identity	Sexual identity	Pronouns
Rachel	cisgender female	bi/demisexual	she/her
Leah	gender non-conforming, non-binary	lesbian	they/them or she/her
Vivianne	cisgender woman	lesbian	she/her
Basil	non-binary	bi	they/them
Haley	nonbinary/genderfluid	lesbian	they/them
Elizabeth	woman/female	gay/lesbian/queer	she/her
Tyler	male	gay	he/him
Sophia	woman	queer/gay	she/her

Charlie	agender	straight	they/them
Bennett	male	bisexual	he/him
Diana	non-binary/genderqueer	bisexual	she/they
Ellie	woman	lesbian	she/her
Michelle	cis woman	bisexual/pansexual	she/her
Lynn	woman	lesbian/queer	she/her
Natasha	non-binary	queer	they/them or she/her
Betty	questioning, presenting as cis female	lesbian	any
Alex	nonbinary/questioning	asexual/aromantic	he/him or they/them

Beyond asking for gender identity, sexual identity, and pronouns, I included an additional question asking participants to determine how “out” they are, with a range of options from 1 (“no one knows about my LGBTQ+ identity, and I avoid sharing it”) to 5 (“everyone in my life knows about my LGBTQ+ identity, and I have no qualms sharing it”). Participants generally leaned towards the higher end of this scale, with no participants choosing option 1—understandably, given that participation in this study might have been viewed as a form of outing oneself. Exactly half of participants chose the second highest ranking (“most people in my life know about my LGBTQ+ identity, and I will share about it if prompted”). The full results of this question are summarized in Figure 2.

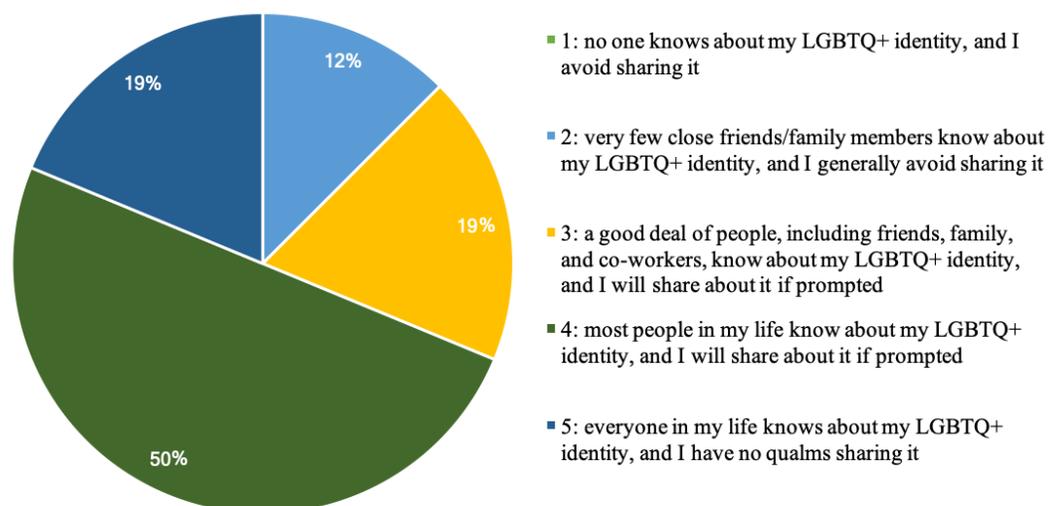


Figure 2. How “out” are you on a scale of 1 to 5?

Data collection and management

The data consist of audiovisual recordings of the five focus groups and the transcripts of those recordings. Each focus group convened for 60–70 minutes. The groups were held over Zoom to accommodate for geographic diversity as well as to minimize potential scheduling complications due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following data collection, each focus group recording was first transcribed by an AI transcription service and then carefully revised by me⁷. Each focus group transcript consisted of around 1200 lines, and the total dataset was comprised of roughly 130 pages of text.

Discussions centered around the everyday experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, with specific attention paid to discussions of inclusion and exclusion in daily interactions. These discussions were semi-structured, with me guiding the conversation, but questions were designed to be open-ended and informal, leaving ample room for participants to share ideas without constraints. A

⁷ Transcription conventions (included in appendix) are adapted from: Tannen, D., Kendall, S., & Gordon, C. (Eds.) (2007). *Family Talk: Discourse and Identity in Four American Families*. Oxford University Press.

focus group methodology was chosen both to encourage uninhibited reflections and to allow participants to engage with one another in a communal setting. This way, participants could make connections with each other in addition to sharing their own personal stories. Unlike individual or group interviews, focus groups emphasize interaction between participants, which can lead to co-constructed narratives and foster joint negotiations of meaning.

Coding

Preparing for analysis

After finalizing the transcripts, I prepared the data for analysis. I coded the transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2022), version 22.1.0, first to identify emerging themes and then to pinpoint different forms of evaluative language used by the participants. This coding schema allowed me to discern, first, the various ways in which different kinds of exclusionary everyday interactions are described by participants, and second, the distinct forms of attitude, engagement, and graduation—the three forms of evaluation accounted for by Martin and White’s (2005) appraisal theory—present in participants’ reflections. Applying to the data a combination of the appraisal method and Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) *sociocultural linguistic approach* to identity, along with the integration of other discourse analytic tools, allowed for a robust investigation of LGBTQ+ identity construction in the face of exclusion.

“Exclusionary everyday interactions”

Because the purposes of this study involved exploring how LGBTQ people are treated in their daily lives and how these interactions are perceived as fostering inclusion or exclusion, an important piece of preparing for analysis was operationalizing and delineating the scope of “exclusionary everyday interactions.” First, I conceptualized the notion of “everyday interaction”

to encompass interactions with family, friends, partners, co-workers, classmates, strangers, and beyond. This understanding of “everyday interaction” is an adaptation of a fundamental conversation analytic definition of “ordinary conversation” from Drew and Heritage (1992): “the predominant medium of interaction in the social world” (p. 19). This definition is used to separate ordinary or everyday communication from language used specifically in institutional contexts. The present study also necessitated a definition of “exclusionary” language to designate approximately which kinds of everyday interactions would be the focus of analysis. Using the data as a guide, I attempted to define exclusionary interactions according to the participants’ own perspectives. In the focus groups, I asked participants to give examples of interactions in which they felt that their queer identity made them stand out. While “standing out” can be seen in a positive light if one is being celebrated or honored in some way, most participants did not give this kind of response. For the most part, responses centered around experiences in which “standing out” was undesirable. Although the participants did not explicitly use the term “exclusionary” in their reflections, I chose to code responses in which participants described their experiences of standing out in negative terms as exclusionary. Because my analysis uses appraisal theory to closely analyze the evaluative language participants use in their reflections, identifying responses in which participants negatively evaluated their experiences was amenable to identifying possible exclusion. This method was thus conducive to finding an appropriate metric for establishing the bounds, imperfect as they may be, of exclusionary everyday interactions.

ANALYSIS

Reactions to exclusion: Minimization

The first prevalent strategy that recurs in participants' reflections of their exclusionary experiences is minimization of the severity of the exclusion. In these examples⁸, participants' descriptions indicate—in more or less explicit terms—that they recognize the potential for these interactions to be interpreted as exclusionary. Nevertheless, they ultimately minimize the exclusionary impact, often justifying this minimization by speculating about reasons for their interlocutors' behavior. A key feature of these examples is the reduction of what Martin and White (2005) call the force (a type of graduation) of the utterance. Altering the force of an utterance allows the speaker to either intensify or diminish its meaning. One way that this reduction of force occurs is through use of hedge words such as “just,” “like,” “slight,” “kind of,” and “sometimes,” which are pervasive in the following examples. Participants also use various forms of affect, judgment, and appreciation in their reflections to demonstrate a lack of investment in the harmful elements of the interaction. Exhibiting some level of indifference allows participants to make the harmful elements of the situations they describe seem less severe, thus mitigating the offensiveness of the exclusionary interaction.

As participants reflect on their interactions, one form of minimization that occurs is their excusing of their interlocutors' intentions, thus reducing the potential for an exclusionary reading of the interaction. In these cases, participants do not dwell on the harm caused and instead evaluate their interlocutors' behavior to provide a rationale for it, mainly in the form of judgment. In the first set of examples, the judgment is of the interlocutors' *capacity*. In Martin

⁸ In the transcript excerpts to come, I use bold type to indicate to the reader that which is most relevant to the analysis. Each focus group is labeled as Groups A through E, and transcription lines are thus numbered as A1, A2, and so on.

and White's (2005) terms, a judgment of capacity is a judgment in the form of *social esteem*, which is an avenue for establishing shared social values. Judgments of social esteem typically involve some kind of "admiration" or "criticism" of the behavior in question (Oteíza, 2017, p. 462). Examples of negative critiques of capacity from Martin and White include stupidity, naïveté, foolishness, ignorance, and incompetence, sentiments which are reflected in the examples below. The particular lack of capacity in question here is a capacity to understand queerness. These participants assert that the interlocutors did not know any better than to make an offensive comment, due to their age, geographic origins, or some other factor that the participants suggest would impede one's capacity to understand the nuances of LGBTQ+ identity. These factors are given as justifications for why the exclusionary impacts of the interaction can or should be minimized.

Haley (they/them) is a nonbinary/genderfluid lesbian who discusses having European relatives who do not comprehend their queer identity. In Example 1, Haley describes interacting with their relatives in small, rural villages in the "middle of nowhere" (line B804), heavily implying that their geographic remoteness leaves them incapable of understanding queerness:

Example 1, Haley

B800 I'm talking like rural

B801 like

B802 northern France and like southwest Germany so like

B803 like the

B804 just **middle of nowhere**, anyways, **to the point where like**

B805 **they're just like confused.**

A few minutes later in the discussion, Haley returns to the topic of their family's incapacity to understand, this time attributing it to language rather than geography. They explain that their parents, despite being "very understanding" (line B882) and "very kind people" (line B883), simply "don't get it" (line B884) due to the binary gender rules of their native language, German:

Example 2, Haley

B881 my parents

B882 who are like **very understanding**,

B883 and like **very kind people**, but also

B884 on some level like **don't get it** like

B885 German is such a gendered language that you–

B886 like there's literally no way to refer to someone without

B887 gendering them as like male or female

Both of Haley's reflections comment on the capacity of the interlocutor to understand LGBTQ+ issues. Describing their relatives as "just like confused" implies that Haley attributes this incomprehension to a lack of intellectual ability, or maybe lack of information, caused by circumstances out of their control—namely, that they live in the "middle of nowhere." The use of a causative structure ("to the point where like," line B804) makes it clear that there is, for Haley, a direct correlation between rurality and lack of LGBTQ+ awareness. They do not report malice as an underlying cause of this confusion. Moreover, Haley's next critique—that their parents "don't get it"—is prefaced with positive character assessments: they are described as "very understanding" and "very kind." Much like "confused," the assessment that they "don't get it" is a judgment of the family members' difficulties comprehending this topic. On the other hand, the latter two evaluations are quite positive assessments. In Martin and White's terms, "understanding" and "kind" are judgments of *propriety*, which fall under the category of *social sanction*. They describe judgments of social sanction as pertaining to ethics, including the domain of good and evil. One could extend this definition to include the benevolent and malicious intentions discussed here. Haley seems to be attributing to their parents an inherent goodness that excuses them from not being able to overcome the binary gender labels they have learned in their native language. Haley even strengthens the force of the utterances with the intensifier "very" in both cases. In general, it may be the case that choosing to see good rather than evil underlying their intentions makes getting along with their relatives easier. In the context

of the focus group, however, Haley's utterances may be serving to construct an identity as someone who is both sympathetic enough to forgive their parents' flaws and savvy enough to know better than them. Depicted in this way, the source of troubles in these family interactions is not Haley's queer identity but their family members' incomprehension. Thus, assessing their relatives as lacking some degree of competence, but possessing some degree of goodness, acts as a rationalization for why Haley need not be overly upset by an interaction with these people, and why they can minimize its exclusionary impacts.

Like Haley, other participants also allude to the supposedly pure intentions of their interlocutors as reasoning for minimizing the impact of an exclusionary interaction. Rachel (she/her) is a cisgender female who identifies as bisexual and demisexual. In Example 3, she is describing her daily interactions with her heterosexual coworkers, who sometimes make a conversation difficult just by being "awkward" (line A140). She downplays the effects of these situations from the start, referring to the exclusionary moments as "the subtleties of it" (line A139) and later trivializing them as "slight" (line A143). Rachel conveys a presumption of innocence, which she indicates by stating that these interlocutors "don't mean to" (line A144) do what they are doing:

Example 3, Rachel

A139 sometimes it's like **the subtleties** of it,
A140 where **people are awkward**, they don't really like—
A141 if I was like *my boyfriend*, they probably wouldn't like have the pauses
A142 or like
A143 just the **slight reactions** that I know that they do,
A144 even though **they don't mean to**.
A145 Like...
A146 it's just very—
A147 it's- it's like—
A148 I mean, **I have experienced discrimination**,
A149 but a lot of the time, **it's just kind of feeling**
A150 **like the other**.

Starting off this explanation by describing these acts in minimizing terms, and then putting forth the idea that those who make her feel excluded “don’t mean to,” serve to mitigate the assignment of blame. She caps off this minimization of the severity of her exclusionary encounters by claiming “I mean, I have experienced discrimination, but a lot of the time, it’s just kind of feeling like the other” (lines A148–150). Rachel compares her experiences of casual social exclusion to a more severe case—that of discrimination—which serves to minimize the impact of her situation. Rachel claims that she has indeed experienced this more severe form of exclusion. However, the concessive structure of “I mean... but,” while not denying the significance of the discrimination she has faced, ultimately works to strengthen her claim that “a lot of the time, it’s just kind of feeling like the other.” Martin and White (2005) classify this kind of statement as a *conceding concurrence*. For appraisal theory, this is a type of *heteroglossic engagement*, which typically indicates “a relatively high degree of commitment by the speaker to the conceded proposition” (p. 125), but which also helps the speaker preempt any backlash that might arise. The statement prefaced by “I mean” is a counterpoint to what will come next, but it is the statement prefaced by “but” that carries the ultimate point of the utterance. Furthermore, the force of Rachel’s entire reflection is consistently weakened by hedges (“like,” “just,” “kind of”) and false starts. Between what she says and how she says it, Rachel’s point seems to be that despite the very *real* instances of discrimination she has faced, most of her experiences as an LGBTQ+ person in the world have resulted in the less-impactful sentiment of “feeling like the other”—a sentiment which I would argue is the epitome of social exclusion.

The presumption of innocence suggested by Rachel is more explicitly stated by Vivianne in Example 4. Vivianne (she/her), a cisgender woman and a lesbian, is recounting how her family members have historically asked overly invasive questions about her sexuality. However,

in this excerpt, by referring to some such questioners as “very innocent” (line A1084), she is both acknowledging the fact that this interrogation is usually *not* innocent, and simultaneously downplaying the impact of these particular well-meaning questioners:

Example 4, Vivianne

A1084 and sometimes like it’s in a **very innocent** like

A1085 oh like how did you know you were gay or whatever,

Vivianne’s evaluation of the person asking “how did you know you were gay” (line A1085) is positive, with “innocent” serving as another kind of propriety or goodness, and “very” acting to strengthen the force of this assessment. Describing the questioner in this way allows Vivianne to minimize the possible negative impacts of this interaction, because unlike other questions she has been asked, she interprets “how did you know you were gay” as a question with no malicious ulterior motives. Her addition of “or whatever” (line A1085) softens the focus of the utterance, perhaps to extend her assessment of this question to include all similar inquiries, or perhaps to further perform lack of investment in the situation, given the potential dismissive interpretation of “whatever.” As a whole, Vivianne’s evaluation foregrounds her minimization of the negative impact of these questions by exonerating her family members from exclusionary intent.

Similarly, Examples 5 and 6 include explicit references to the interlocutors’ supposedly positive intentions. Bennett (he/him) is a bisexual male who discusses how his bisexuality has made him subject to a unique kind of exclusion, wherein many people treat him as a gay man and ignore the nuances of his identity. In this excerpt, he is describing a night out with a female bisexual friend who had repeatedly made assumptions about him that made him feel like he stood out. However, Bennett gives his friend the benefit of the doubt twice, stating that she has “no like ill intent” (line D316) and later “no like bad intent” (line D331) and using the fact that she bought him a drink (line D329) as evidence of these good intentions:

Example 5, Bennett

D316 she had s- **I know there's no like ill intent**, because you know,
D317 **she's bi as well**,
[...]
D324 she's like oh come on,
D325 like get up and we could talk to some cute boys or some- like
D326 again like, I don't know why- why that was like necessary,
D327 um, I know again,
D328 I know there was like-
D329 she ended up buying me a drink.
D330 You know, like, there's no um
D331 **there's no like bad intent** but again like,

In a way, Bennett is using his friend's bisexuality, and the fact that they share this identity ("as well," line D317) to justify her remarks. He posits a causal relationship ("because," line D317) between her lack of ill intent and her bisexual identity. Nevertheless, her comments affected him. Later, Bennett tells a different story, this time about his mother's alarmist reaction to his coming out, which also incorporates the presumption of innocence "she didn't mean it" (line D648):

Example 6, Bennett

D642 and then when I told my mom,
D643 over the phone when I was in Australia,
D644 um
D645 the <laughing> first thing she said </> was um,
D646 um you know you can get AIDS.
D647 And I know like-
D648 **that sounds really bad, I mean she didn't- she didn't mean it**,
D649 I think she really just wanted to be like, you know, have safe sex.

In both of Bennett's examples, he makes it clear that he recognizes a potentially negative interpretation of these interactions. This is especially evident in Example 6, when he states "I know like- that sounds really bad" (lines D647-648). He counters the potential badness, however, by adding "I mean she didn't- she didn't mean it" (line D648), and giving a possible positive interpretation of her statement ("I think she really just wanted to be like, you know, have safe sex," line D649). The discourse marker "I mean" in this justification further intensifies his point, as Kiesling (2020) has shown that "I mean" often strengthens a speaker's investment in a

claim. In Example 5, Bennett’s recognition of the potential problem and his counterstatement occur at the same time, when he states that “there’s no like ill/bad intent.” The two examples Bennett provides discuss extremely different topics: being encouraged to talk to cute boys, on the one hand, and being warned that he could contract AIDS on the other. Yet in both cases, as in Vivianne’s example, the speaker finds ways to discursively minimize the severity of the interactions by claiming innocent intentions on the part of the interlocutors.

Participants in Examples 7–9 take a slightly different approach, using their interlocutors’ age as a justification for ignorance, but with the same outcome: rationalizing the minimization of the interaction’s negative impact. In Example 7, Leah (they/them or she/her), a gender nonconforming lesbian, describes that when her parents show a lack of understanding, she reminds herself of their generational gap and the cultural differences that might come with it—including that they are “erasing past prejudices” (line A920) and “don’t go to therapy” (line A921). In Example 8, agender participant Charlie (they/them) explains that their interactions with older people are affected by the possibility that these older generations are either “disgusted” (line C466) or they “don’t get it” (line C466). In Example 9, Sophia (she/her), a queer woman, expresses that “especially with older people, they just sometimes don’t know better” (lines C1318–1319):

Example 7, Leah

A919 you know, **they don’t know what to do**,
A920 it’s- it’s a lot of like erasing past prejudices for them,
A921 they don’t go to therapy,
A922 like **they’re older** or whatever.

Example 8, Charlie

C464 **for older generations**, I know because it’s usually a
C465 there’s a- they’re- they’re I don’t know,
C466 disgusted, or **they don’t get it**,

Example 9, Sophia

C1313 I mean I think **sometimes people are just genuinely curious,**
C1314 um and like, **they don't mean it in like a**
C1315 **you know, disrespectful way,**
C1316 even though like that's absolutely how it comes off
C1317 and is disrespectful.
C1318 But like, I don't know like **especially with older people,**
C1319 **they just sometimes don't know better** and like

Like Haley's reflections, these examples demonstrate judgments of the interlocutors' capacity to understand queerness. Leah's "they don't know what to do" (line A919), Charlie's "they don't get it" (line C466), and Sophia's "they just sometimes don't know better" (line C1319) all point to some level of difficulty comprehending LGBTQ+ issues, or at least knowing how to act in ways that do not have exclusionary impacts. In each of these cases, the participants attribute this lack of understanding to generation or age. Both Charlie and Sophia give epistemic disclaimers ("I don't know," lines C465 and C1318), while Leah displays a relatively high level of epistemic certainty about the correlation between age and capacity to understand. In Martin and White's (2005) terms, such certainty constitutes *monoglossic engagement*, wherein the speaker expresses a strong commitment to the claim they are making, asserting it as information that is not up for debate. All of these participants seem to share a belief that progressive views on social issues, including questions of gender and sexuality, are necessarily more popular among young people.

This belief continues to manifest throughout these reflections. Leah suggests that her parents who "don't know what to do" are harboring outdated views due to their age, when she explains that they are tasked with "erasing past prejudices." By adding that "they don't go to therapy," she seems to be insinuating that homophobia is an ailment curable by professional intervention, and that without this treatment, people who are "older or whatever" (line A922) are at a loss; they simply "don't know what to do." For Charlie, there is less certainty that it is simply a matter of incapacity; it might instead be that these older generations are "disgusted." On

the other hand, Sophia's description of her interlocutors as "genuinely curious" (line C1313) brings in another notable perspective. In this statement, these two words read as connoting something positive. They seem to be acting as positive judgments of propriety (implying an inherent goodness to the quality of being "curious") and of veracity (implying that to wonder something "genuinely" makes it more true or authentic). Furthermore, modifying the entire phrase is the mitigating discourse marker "just" (line C1313). Sophia's explanation as a whole is reminiscent of Antaki and Wetherell's (1999) three-part concession structure, wherein the speaker first says something that she acknowledges as potentially problematic ("they don't mean it in like a, you know, disrespectful way," lines C1314-1315), then provides counter-evidence to that statement ("even though that's absolutely how it comes off and is disrespectful," lines C1316-1317), and then finally reaffirms the initial assertion ("they just sometimes don't know better," line C1319). The use of this structure shows that Sophia recognizes the potential issue of letting someone get away with making comments that are "disrespectful" without challenging them. Still, like the participants in the other examples above, Sophia is determined to demonstrate that there is no underlying malicious intent behind these comments; rather, old age seems to have an incontrovertible effect on one's ability to understand queerness. These judgments all use this inevitable incapacity as a reasoning for minimizing the exclusionary nature of the interaction.

Finally, in a few cases, participants simply react with general nonchalance, without claiming their interlocutors' innocence or incapacity. In these examples, participants seem relatively unbothered by the exchange, despite the negative charge it carries. Participants here do not attempt to minimize the severity of their interlocutors' intentions; they simply minimize the severity of the impact the interactions have had on them personally. This is exemplified by

participants' general mitigation of the acuteness of the exclusionary experience. There is still an expression of affect in these reflections; the emotional component is simply that the speaker is denying, rather than claiming, a severe emotional response. Affect, after all, does not refer exclusively to the extreme ends of human emotion. As Martin and White (2005) explain, affect "is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored?" (p. 42). It is thus a legitimate expression of affect to say "it doesn't make me feel great, doesn't make me feel bad" (lines E306–307) as Lynn does in Example 10, below. Lynn (she/her) is a lesbian who describes being routinely mistaken for a man in public and referred to as "sir," which she describes with plain ambivalence:

Example 10, Lynn

E304 it- **it gets pretty funny**, especially with masks,
E305 **I get called sir a lot**,
E306 um which doesn't bother me, **it doesn't make me feel great, doesn't →**
E307 **make me feel bad**, but
E308 um
E309 and **I've never felt like**,
E310 **in danger or anything**,
E311 um
E312 in- **in the south**, it's just kind of,
E313 oh, you're- you're- you're different, you're a little weird. <laughs>
E314 Um
E315 and **people don't really know what to do with that**,
E316 um which
E317 **kind of just makes me giggle.**

In the beginning of this statement, Lynn is mitigating the potential negative effects of exclusion by, rather than saying "it makes me feel bad," opting for the more complex negation structure "it doesn't make me feel great" (line E306). Semanticists describe this usage of a negated adjective to describe neither of the two antonyms (i.e., neither "good" nor "bad") but actually a quality somewhere in between (i.e., "so-so") as *mitigation effects* (Aina, et al., 2019). She then continues the mitigation by adding, "doesn't make me feel bad" (lines E306–307). In both cases, she is

asserting that her feeling is somewhere in between positive and negative—i.e., indifferent. Lynn then further minimizes her experiences of exclusion by expanding the scope of her evaluation beyond its original purpose (describing being addressed as “sir” by strangers) into the vast array of experiences that threaten LGBTQ+ persons out in the world, which, in many cases, lead to physical danger. Thus, the addition of “I’ve never felt like, in danger or anything” (lines E309–310) serves to diminish the importance of the exclusions to which Lynn has been victim, because her experiences have never led her to a position of being endangered. The introduction of the possibility of danger into this narrative implies that Lynn might believe there is a shared expectation that an experience such as being misgendered by a stranger in public might indeed lead to danger, but she denies that that has been her experience, reinforcing the mundanity of these incidents. Here, she uses hedges (“like,” “or anything”) to again diffuse the intensity of the statement. She is both softening the focus and weakening the force of her utterance, allowing her to demonstrate a lack of investment in this claim to feeling. She closes out this reflection by bringing in the common narrative of incompetence (“people don’t really know what to do,” line E315) for people who live in regions deemed less metropolitan (“in the south,” line E312), and then making light of this issue by adding that it makes her “giggle” (line E317). Despite the potential harm of the situations she is discussing, Lynn continuously minimizes the severity of the experience and demonstrates that its impacts on her personally have been negligible.

One more example shows how a distinctly exclusionary interaction can be portrayed as not warranting a strong reaction. In Example 11, Michelle (she/her), a bisexual cis woman, is describing how she feels like she has been made to stand out in her family. Though the interaction she recounts revolves around something that is objectively negative—being told that

she is “going to hell” (line E133), she attributes this to her family’s religious values and manages to swiftly downplay the significance of the statement by calling it “fine” (line E135):

Example 11, Michelle

E131 my family is very conservative, very religious,
E132 um
E133 **they think that everyone who’s queer is going to hell,**
E134 **and they tell me frequently**
E135 **that I’m going to hell, which is fine.**

First, she gives a judgment of her family, describing them as “very conservative, very religious” (line E131). In this case, these attributes serve as judgments of *normality* (another form of judgment of social esteem); what follows would be unusual if not for the abnormal circumstances of her family’s extreme beliefs. The force of these judgments is strengthened both times (“very”) to highlight just how strong the influence of this abnormality is. Prefaced in this way, the fact that these family members tell Michelle “frequently” (line E134) that she (along with “everyone who’s queer,” line E133) is going to hell is almost predictable. Still, the way Michelle assesses this experience—an indubitably exclusionary interaction—as merely “fine” reinforces precisely how quotidian it is for her. Michelle’s evaluation is a perfect example of nonchalance or indifference as a reaction to an interaction that would generally be considered exclusionary, wherein something that might be expected to cause great psychological distress instead results in a distinct lack of concern. What sets Michelle and Lynn apart from the previous examples is the reported frequency of their experiences, which could explain their particular type of minimization. Lynn’s claim that “I get called sir a lot” (line E305) and Michelle’s assertion that “they tell me frequently” (line E134) both demonstrate that neither event was a one-time occurrence, and the participants may have grown accustomed to this treatment as a result of the relative commonness of these experiences. Their minimizations can thus focus less on the intentions of the interlocutor and more on the impact (or lack thereof) on themselves.

For all of the examples above, one reason or another is given to justify why participants respond to their queerphobic or exclusionary interactions with minimization. For many, it is a matter of looking on their interlocutors with a sympathetic perspective—the idea being that the speaker made an honest mistake in saying the wrong thing, and that this one instance is not an accurate reflection of their character. Participants taking this approach seem to be conjecturing about the intentions of their interlocutors, as if they have a firm grasp on the inner contents of their minds. On the other hand, some participants’ justifications rely on external characteristics of their interlocutors, slipping into ageism or other forms of stereotyping. These justifications include dismissive blanket statements about large groups of people, based mainly on age or geographic origins, with built-in assumptions about such groups’ views on gender and sexuality—assumptions which may or may not be based on participants’ past experiences. In some cases, however, it is neither sympathy nor condescension towards the interlocutor that emerges in the explanation, but rather a lack of personal investment in the situation at large, perhaps due to habituation. The way that participants reflect on these particular interactions shows that they evaluate them as both having the potential to be interpreted as exclusionary and simultaneously not being worthy of serious consideration.

Unlike the two groups to come, in which participants respond with either fear or frustration, the examples provided thus far show participants clearly using minimization strategies to explain the lukewarm way they reacted. It is possible that participants are responding to some external pressure telling them that they *should* be more proactive in their responses, actively choosing to stand up for the queer community no matter what, and that not doing so would be a face-threatening act. Jones (2018a), for example, shows how the prevailing ideology that queer people are expected to be unwavering in their pride and self-confidence

actually has counterproductive effects on some LGBTQ+ individuals. It would follow that they might then choose to minimize the exclusionary impact of certain queerphobic interactions as a means of protecting themselves from criticism. As the following sections will show, minimization is by no means the only or even the primary way that LGBTQ+ people respond to exclusionary interactions, but its existence at all might tell us more about the participants themselves than about those whose actions they are minimizing.

Reactions to exclusion: Fear

The second overarching category of responses to queerphobic exclusionary interactions as reported in participants' reflections is fear. As an emotional response, fear manifests in a few different ways, including general anxiety, specific worries, and avoidance. At times, participants express that a situation at large has left them in a state of anxiety, without pinpointing about what exactly they are anxious. In other cases, participants tell in more detail what worries they have, and what exactly they fear might happen, which leads them to a distressed state. Other cases include instances where participants choose avoidance of the discussion rather than escalating a situation that already strikes fear in them. Each of these fearful responses align with one of three of Martin and White's (2005) categories of negative affect: *insecurity*, *disinclination*, and *dissatisfaction*. General anxiety closely mirrors what Martin and White (2005) describe as insecurity, or "emotions concerned with ecosocial well-being" (p. 49). Following their definition, negative manifestations of insecurity include uneasiness, anxiety, and the feeling of being "freaked out." When participants voice a specific worry about what might happen, participants are expressing a precise disinclination. These disinclinations are described by Martin and White as stimuli that are *irrealis* rather than *realis*. Such worried feelings preempt an unrealized event or situation rather than reacting to something that has actually happened. They are intentional

rather than reactionary, grammatically construed via desiderative constructions rather than emotive ones (see Table 2 for further examples of irrealis affect). Finally, avoidance relates to dissatisfaction, which takes shape as both *ennui* and *displeasure*. When people get tired of dealing with the same unsatisfactory treatment time and time again, they may choose to disengage entirely. Because dis/satisfaction is a form of affect that “covers emotions concerned with telos (the pursuit of goals)” (p. 49), one can imagine that if the goal of an interaction is connection or acceptance, repeated rejections would lead to a feeling of dissatisfaction. In this case, dissatisfaction results in decreased engagement in the interaction, either via ignoring unpleasant comments or avoiding certain topics of conversation. Still, it should not be assumed that this avoidance is inherently passive. In fact, these participants appear to be actively choosing to disengage, for reasons that will be discussed. For the purposes of this study, all of these reactions fall under the category of fear.

Table 2. Irrealis affect (adapted from Martin & White, 2005, p. 48).

DIS/INCLINATION	Surge (of behavior)	Disposition
fear	tremble, shudder, cower	wary, fearful, terrorized
desire	suggest, request, demand	miss, long for, yearn for

In the first example (Example 12), Vivianne is describing the tension and anxiety she feels while watching television shows with lesbian content when her family is present. In her reflection, Vivianne shows all three of the aforementioned forms of negative affect: insecurity expressed as general anxiety, disinclination expressed as specific worries, and dissatisfaction expressed as avoidance. Her reaction to this occurrence is to “immediately just like tense up” (line A937), and to wonder about what her family might be thinking. In the end, she reports preferring to stay quiet when these uncomfortable situations come up, not showing any genuine reactions to the content of the program due to her anxieties:

Example 12, Vivianne

A933 like, you know, I watch any TV show that has a lesbian in it,
A934 um and if like
A935 one of those- like I happen to be watching like an episode with my family,
A936 like
A937 **I immediately just like tense up** like if there's like a scene where that →
A938 happens like I feel very
A939 like **they never like say anything** like they also kinda just like stare →
A940 straight ahead of the TV and then it
A941 moves on and like whatever, but
A942 like 'cause I feel very much like-
A943 like **it feels like they must be thinking of me** the second they see that,
A944 you know like it's not like a-
A945 like even if a gay man comes on I guess it's not quite the same,
A946 but like with women, 'cause I'm like,
A947 oh, like, **do they think this is what I do or like what I act like or something?**
A948 Um
A949 and it just is like a weird like
A950 there's kind of nothing *to* talk about,
A951 and **it's not like they're going to say anything,**
A952 **but it does make me feel kind of like**
A953 **anxious** and it also like **ruins like if I'm like really happy** that like these →
A954 two characters are finally together, like I don't ever really express that

Vivianne expresses her feelings explicitly, in the form of tension (“I immediately just like tense up,” line A937) and anxiety (“it does make me feel kind of like anxious,” lines A952–953), as well as specific worries about what her family might be thinking (“it feels like they must be thinking of me,” line A943; “do they think this is what I do or like what I act like or something,” line A947) and the avoidance strategy that she uses to protect herself (“I don't ever really express that,” line A954). Towards the end of her response, she acknowledges the positive emotion that she is missing out on by feeling the need to contain her joy when watching television with the family. Her anxious feeling is discursively weakened by hedges (“kind of like anxious,” lines A952–953), but her potential joy is strengthened (“really happy,” line A953). In reflecting on her fearful reaction, Vivianne both downplays her negative emotions and emphasizes her positive emotions (nonexistent as they may be). Interestingly, while Vivianne is talking about how she

rarely gets the chance to express her happiness due to the feeling of being in an unwelcoming environment, her negative evaluation and mitigation techniques get in the way of her ability to describe a possibly positive experience. Also noteworthy is that she acknowledges that she may respond with fear whether an exclusionary comment is actually voiced or not: “they never like say anything” (line A939) and “it’s not like they’re going to say anything” (line A951). Even the thought of being in a scenario which has the potential to devolve into exclusion is enough to provoke anxiety. The fact that this situation “ruins” (line A953) Vivianne’s potential for happiness and, more specifically, her potential ability to *express* said happiness, is not insignificant. It is the very idea of being criticized, judged, or excluded that prompts a preemptive change of emotional state from happy to anxious and fearful. This is precisely what Martin and White mean when they refer to fear as an unrealistic emotion—the fact that the fear is not realized does not make the emotion any less palpable in the moment. Even in a situation as mundane as watching television, knowing that an environment may be hostile to queer people can stimulate strong emotional reactions.

The next examples focus on fearful responses to more general exclusionary comments from family members. Like Vivianne, Rachel in Example 13 explains that when sexuality is the topic of discussion with her family, she becomes anxious—although she does not specify exactly what makes her anxious (aside from “this situation,” line A981). She goes on to state that to avoid worsening the situation, she refrains from contributing at all:

Example 13, Rachel

A981 this situation for me **gives me very severe anxiety**,
A982 and so it- it’s more of like **protection** thing to prevent
A983 my situation from being worse is that
A984 **I don’t say anything** <laughs>

Rachel strengthens the force of her feelings by describing her anxiety as “very severe” (line A981). What she is worried about in this case seems to be the general thought of her situation “being worse” (line A983), and she chooses avoidance—“I don’t say anything” (line A984)—as a way to try to ensure that things do not go too far. Her description of this tactic as a form of “protection” (line A982) is important. Though she is the only participant who explicitly names it, there is likely a degree of self-protection going on in many of these reflections. Rather than letting oneself be a target or victim of hateful language, stopping the situation before it gets too extreme is a way of attempting to find a safe way out. Example 14 is another case of self-protection, in which Tyler (he/him), a gay male whose older sister Morgan came out as a lesbian when he was a child, discusses his decision to wait many years to come out to his family. Tyler’s anxiety has a clear source (his parents’ reaction to his sister’s coming out), and his fear is specific (that they will again react poorly). This pivotal moment in Tyler’s childhood resulted in a lingering sense of anxiety, conditioning him to want to keep his sexuality a secret until he felt safe to disclose it:

Example 14, Tyler

C699 I think

C700 that put **a lot of pressure on me**

C701 like **seeing how they reacted** to her coming out

C702 and it wasn’t in the best light.

C703 Um but I think just like

C704 seeing that from a young age and then having to like

C705 then being like, **ok, that’s like bad-** like I kind of associated it with like →

C706 bad and I’m like, ok, they–

C707 **they really reacted negatively when Morgan came out like I feel like I →**

C708 **can’t do that right now.**

C709 So I kinda would always **push it off**

Tyler explains that he carried “a lot of pressure” (line C700) after seeing “how they reacted to her coming out” (line C701). He later specifies that “they really reacted negatively when Morgan came out” (line C707), and he explains that after witnessing this at a young age, he began to develop a negative evaluation of homosexuality: “ok, that’s like bad- like I kind of associated it

with like bad” (lines C705–706). He uses this memory to explain why he decided to wait a while before coming out to his parents. Tyler recalls the feeling he had at the time as, “I feel like I can’t do that right now” (lines C707–708). He thus resorted to avoidance (“I kinda would always push it off,” line C709), as a way to protect himself from an equally negative reaction, until he felt like he was ready to face it. In this case, Tyler’s worry about what might happen, though technically unrealistic, was based entirely in reality, a situation that conditioned him to fear what might happen. Knowing that a particular audience may be unwelcoming of any discussion of queerness indeed is reason enough for LGBTQ+ individuals to respond with fear, anxiety, and avoidance.

Other participants give examples of some of the precise worries they felt in the moments before disclosing their gender or sexual identity to someone in their life, due in part to prior exclusionary experiences. Similar to Tyler’s story, these examples focus on the feeling of fear the speaker had in anticipation of the moment of disclosure, rather than on what actually ended up happening. Basil (they/them) is a non-binary person who explains in Example 15 the fear they felt prior to coming out to their father. A few moments before this excerpt, Basil had explained that the Romanian side of their family had been refusing to call them by their preferred name for seven years. Reasonably, they had adapted to expect nothing but rejection from this group:

Example 15, Basil

B850 I had just like—

B851 **I thought he was gonna disown me**, I had like come to terms with

B852 never talking to the Romanian parts of my family again,

Basil voices their fear clearly: “I thought he was gonna disown me” (line B851). They add that they had prepared for an extremely negative reaction: “I had like come to terms with never talking to the Romanian parts of my family again” (lines B851-852). Much to Basil’s surprise, though, when they came out as non-binary, the family was unexpectedly accepting. In reflecting on this time, Basil recognizes that there seemed to be a very plausible chance that they might be

disowned and cut off from the family. Thus, even if in reality such events did not come to pass, this unrealistic fear, too, was based in reality, since their relatives had previously given no indication that they would be accepting of Basil's queer identity; they had shown precisely the opposite.

A projection of general background knowledge about a person or persons onto a specific fear is demonstrated again in the next example. In Example 16, Charlie discusses how they came out as agender to their heterosexual, cisgender male partner. They describe basing their fear of rejection on their interlocutor's personal identity and certain stereotypes that surrounded it:

Example 16, Charlie

C1071 **I was nervous about like**

C1072 **would he feel like this is an attack on his manhood** or something,

C1073 which I- I had no reason to, other than

C1074 he's a big football player from- from uh

C1075 like from the United States with entrenched gender norms like,

Charlie voices their anxiety about what might happen ("I was nervous about like would he feel like this is an attack on his manhood or something," lines C1071–1072), and it is described in terms of a relational process directly in reaction to something external. The reason for Charlie's worry is given in the form of preconceived notions about the type of person their partner is: "he's a big football player from- from uh like from the United States with entrenched gender norms" (lines C1074-1075). Though Charlie recognizes that these facts alone would not necessarily determine their partner's reaction to the situation ("I had no reason to," line C1073), the fear of the stereotype coming true remained present. Like the other examples, Charlie's reflection gives some insight into where participants' worries about specific fears being realized might have their origins. Example 17 shows one final manifestation of a similar situation. Ellie (she/her) is a lesbian with conservative, religious parents. She describes the feelings she had before coming out to them (which she knew was a risk because of their views on sexuality) and the decision she made to tell them in public rather than in private:

Example 17, Ellie

D786 Um so when I first came out to my parents when I was um
D787 on my nineteenth birthday, they took me out for breakfast and I
D788 decided to tell them there because **I felt like I was less likely to cry** in a →
D789 public setting,
D790 um
D791 **and I didn't want to cry** because I had already been
D792 like dealing with it for five years and **I didn't want them to think that I →**
D793 **didn't know what I was doing.**

Ellie's reflection of this moment centers around the fact that she "didn't want to cry" (line D791) and therefore went to a restaurant, since she was "less likely to cry in a public setting" (lines D788–789). Her explanation for this desire is that she "had already been dealing with it for five years" (lines D791–792), "it" presumably being her sexuality, and "didn't want them to think that [she] didn't know what [she] was doing" (lines D792–793). Ellie seems to fear being perceived as incompetent or uncertain about her sexuality, which is why she wanted to project an air of confidence. Implicit in this reflection is that she had been avoiding facing this fear for five years, and that she wanted her parents to know she was sure when she finally told them. All three of these examples from Basil, Charlie, and Ellie show participants describing fears they had about disclosing their LGBTQ+ identities, all stemming from negative experiences that they had had with these interlocutors in the past. Two of these participants voice their fears as mental processes, rather than explicit emotions: Basil refers to thoughts ("I thought he was gonna disown me," B851), and Ellie refers to wants ("I didn't want to cry [...] I didn't want them to think that I didn't know what I was doing," D791–793). For Charlie, the affect is explicitly expressed as an emotion ("I was nervous," C1071). Despite the intense worries all of these participants have experienced, some use discursive strategies to distance themselves from the feeling of fear, possibly as yet another form of self-protection, preserving face and staving off excessive vulnerability.

A final example shows how a fearful response to discussing one's sexuality can stem from a fear of being stereotyped. Like Vivianne above, who worried about what her family would think of her if they saw her watching lesbian content on television, the next example shows a participant who is afraid of how people's opinions of her will be affected by their knowledge of her sexuality. In Example 18, Lynn is describing the difference between talking about her sexuality around other queer people and talking about it around people who do not share an LGBTQ+ identity:

Example 18, Lynn

E751 in like spaces where people don't identify
E752 or at least don't openly identify as LGBTQ,
E753 **I feel like if I do,**
E754 **then that becomes like**
E755 **my thing,**
E756 **and I'm not allowed to be other things,**
[...]
E767 like, I'm in a like a master's program, and **I just don't really**
E768 **talk as much about**
E769 **being gay with-**
E770 um
E771 with them,
E772 even though like **they talk about being straight all the time,**
E773 they love to talk about it,
E774 um I- because **I just don't want that to be like my brand,**
E775 you know?

Lynn expresses a fear of having people make assumptions about her due to her sexuality. She states her fear in terms of negative consequences of disclosing her sexuality: "I feel like if *I* do [identify as LGBTQ+], then that becomes like my thing, and I'm not allowed to be other things" (lines E753–756). There is clearly a dissatisfaction she has developed, perhaps from past experiences in which this consequence was realized. She has learned to identify environments where she feels comfortable talking about her identity and environments where she does not ("spaces where people don't identify or at least don't openly identify as LGBTQ," lines E751–

752). She explains her worry that these audiences will not be receptive because they will start to see her as one-dimensional, with her sexuality being her only defining feature (“I just don’t want that to be like my brand,” line E774). As a way to prevent this fear coming true, she chooses to avoid talking about her sexuality—“I just don’t really talk as much about being gay with- um with them” (lines E767–771). One can assume that the “them” here refers to straight people, since she continues by saying “even though like they talk about being straight all the time, they love to talk about it” (lines E772–773). This comment points out the gross inequality of the hidden privileges of being able to talk openly about one’s romantic or sexual life without judgment. Lynn is alluding here to the heteronormative ideals that allow heterosexual people to talk about their relationships without having to worry about it becoming their “thing” or their “brand,” simply because it is the societal norm to do so. Because Lynn does not have this privilege as a queer person, she chooses to avoid talking about her identity, as a way to protect herself from being pigeonholed.

The fearful responses to exclusionary interactions discussed in this section show an alternative to the minimizing reactions above, wherein participants acknowledge how the exclusionary nature of the interaction has impacted them by causing anxiety, stress, or fear and, in some cases, explain how this has influenced them to keep quiet about their queerness. The stories shared in the examples above range from the pivotal moment of coming out to one’s loved ones to the most banal of everyday experiences, but fear of judgment, rejection, and exclusion are central to them all. One important aspect of these examples is that they show that what makes an interaction feel exclusionary to its LGBTQ+ participants is not always black and white. Some participants explain that even when an exclusionary comment has not been voiced, they still feel anxious or afraid of what might come next. In many cases, it is past experiences

that trigger this sense of fear, but other times it is the mere possibility that something could go wrong, due to what is known about queerphobia in the world. In a way, the existence of anti-queer exclusion begets fear of more anti-queer exclusion. These examples point to a crucial observation: often, it is simply the specter of queerphobia that is enough to put LGBTQ+ people on edge in an otherwise (seemingly) harmless interaction.

Reactions to exclusion: Exasperation

The third and final major category of participants' responses to exclusionary everyday interactions as expressed in their reflections is exasperation. Unlike the first category, this group makes no effort to downplay the severity of the impact of the situation, and unlike the second category, this group does not keep their reactions to themselves. This category is embodied by proactive responses, wherein participants take some kind of action. Their exasperation may take the form of anger, aggression, and hostility, or it may take the form of annoyance or frustration at having to explain themselves. For these examples, it is important to note that just because an utterance does not include explicit descriptions of one's emotional state does not mean that it does not convey affect. As Martin (2003) explains, it is often the case that judgment and appreciation can be thought of as recontextualizations of affect rather than entirely separate categories of evaluation. In the case of the reactions presented here, participants appear to be channeling their emotions into either judgments of their interlocutors' behavior or appreciations of the situations in which they find themselves. Furthermore, the exasperation expressed in these examples could be described by Martin and White (2005) as a form of displeasure, a type of dissatisfaction. Like some of the fearful and avoidant responses above, anger or frustration may arise in response to a lack of satisfaction with respect to one's personal goals. When one's goals of being accepted or included are so clearly not being met, some participants react with hostility,

expressing outward aggression in response to the exclusionary comments they have received. Other displays of exasperation involve the participants opting for taking on the role of advocate or educator—not because they want to, but because they see it as an obligation to intervene in order to stop the propagation of false information. At the root of both the aggressive reactions and the reluctant self-explanations is an emotional base of exasperation.

In the first set of examples, participants make clear that the way they have been treated is not only negative, but actually anger-inducing. However, participants do not express their anger in explicit emotional terms; rather, they enact their anger using a number of linguistic resources, including what Tannen (2007) calls constructed dialogue. Tannen describes constructed dialogue as a way for speakers to creatively frame information, engaging the audience with a dramatic presentation of the speakers' experience. This can either represent an internal thought process or a report of what was said, in the way that the speaker remembers it. Using constructed dialogue allows the speaker to vividly show what happened rather than merely telling it, often in the form of a micro-narrative. In the following examples, Leah and Charlie use expletives, rhetorical questions, violent imagery, and emphatic prosody while telling these micro-narratives, all of which serve to demonstrate their anger. First, in Example 19, Leah narrates how she has reacted to two incidents with her family involving anti-queer sentiments: one in which her father talked about a gay co-worker, and another in which her brother talked about Donald Trump's views on gay people. In both stories, Leah demonstrates the visceral anger with which she responded:

Example 19, Leah

A880 if he says anything negative about him

A881 that like because he's gay

A882 I'll just be like **are you fucking kidding me right now?**

A883 **Are you stupid?**

A884 Like, **you wanna fight?**

[...]

A896 like my little brother one time said that Trump supported gay people

A897 **and I lost my fucking mind,**
A898 **on him,**
A899 and I was like on FaceTime with him and my dad,
A900 and I was like,
A901 first of all,
A902 you can't say these things to me.
A903 I was like **you can say whatever the fuck you want when I'm not there,**
A904 **but like you're not going to talk to me about gay rights.**
A905 And
A906 **I like blew up**
A907 and then I got in trouble
A908 for like, getting mad at him because he's like 13.
A909 I was like, **he shouldn't talk about politics then!**
A910 **Get off my fucking back.**

Leah uses micro-narratives to demonstrate what she was feeling in the moments of the described interactions, switching between recounting what she actually said and recounting how she was feeling. Her reflection includes expletives (“fucking,” lines A882, A897, A910; “fuck,” line A903), rhetorical questions (“Are you fucking kidding me right now? Are you stupid? Like, you wanna fight?,” lines A882–884), violent imagery (“you wanna fight?,” line A884; “I like blew up,” line A906), and emphatic prosody (increased speed and volume throughout). Some pieces of her reflection, like “get off my fucking back” (line A910) could either be her own internal monologue or something she actually uttered in the moment. Leah is evaluating first her father’s homophobic comments about a gay coworker, which she deems as both stupid and possibly lacking seriousness, and which also generate in her enough anger to warrant the proposition of a physical altercation. She is critiquing both her father’s intellect and seriousness in this argument, as well as his ability to defend himself in a fight in the name of his homophobic speech. These utterances can thus be classified as encompassing a judgment of veracity (“are you fucking kidding me right now?”), of capacity (“Are you stupid?”), and of tenacity (“you wanna fight?”). Her second evaluation is of her younger brother’s ability to participate in a political discussion about gay rights. Due to his young age and relative unfamiliarity with the subject matter, Leah is

judging him as incapable of making any meaningful contribution to this discussion (“you’re not going to talk to me about gay rights,” line A904). Without voicing any explicit feelings, Leah managed to describe in detail the anger and exasperation she felt in these situations. In Example 20, Charlie uses similar strategies while describing how they decided to come out as agender to their mother, making clear the fiery feelings that underpinned this decision:

Example 20, Charlie

C935 so, yeah, I actually came out to her first because I was like
C936 you know what, **fuck it**, I re- actually **don’t give a shit** <laughs>
C937 if she accepts me or not,
C938 because I’m–
C939 **I’m a grown-ass person**, I don’t depend on my parents for anything,
C940 um I made sure of that, and so I was like, yeah, **you know what**,
C941 she decided that she was going to visit unannounced?
C942 **You know what**,
C943 fine, I’m gonna just drop this little
C944 **truth bomb** on her and see what happens, so um

Like Leah, Charlie uses expletives (“fuck,” line C936; “shit,” line C936; “grown-ass,” line C939), rhetorical questions (“you know what,” lines C940 and C942), and violent imagery (“truth bomb,” line C944) to demonstrate their feelings of anger and exasperation. Charlie also makes a point of emphasizing the distance they feel from the person causing the anger (“I don’t depend on my parents for anything, um I made sure of that,” lines C939–940), perhaps making it easier to take a risk and disclose their gender identity. This particular line also functions to create a strong, independent self-image for Charlie, ready for any negative backlash. It is similar to Leah’s proposal of “you wanna fight?” to her father. In both lines, the speakers are using the retelling of their narratives to construct a more positive identity, actively challenging the negativity with which their queerness has been (or is suspected to be) viewed by their family members. Linguistically, these examples show that anger as a form of affect can be expressed in many ways; speakers demonstrate affect, like other forms of evaluative language, using every layer of linguistic resources, from syntax and lexicon to discourse features and prosody. Anger is

also expressed through speakers' overall evaluations of their situations, which are decidedly negative and which involve either judgment or appreciation of their interlocutors. In other words, it is not necessary to explicitly claim "I am angry that you are being homophobic" for this to be the sentiment communicated through these utterances.

The next set of examples shows a different form of exasperation, wherein participants channel their frustration into explaining themselves or their queer identities—albeit reluctantly—in the face of consistently being misunderstood. In these examples, participants find themselves tasked with having to justify queerness in some way or another: in Example 21, Bennett describes the burden of consistently having to justify his bisexuality; in Example 22, Rachel explains a similar sentiment regarding her demisexuality; and in Example 23, Leah discusses the role she has taken on at work, advocating for the workplace to be more inclusive of different gender identities. Together, these examples show three non-aggressive but indeed frustrated manifestations of exasperation about discussing LGBTQ+ issues:

Example 21, Bennett

D75 I- I just **I always feel like I have to like**,
D76 you know, **prove my bisexuality**, es- esp- um
D77 especially like,
D78 I guess the hetero part of that?
D79 Like, oh, well,
D80 um
D81 well like **how many girls you've been with** or whatnot.
D82 It's just like, **there's this constant questioning** of like,
D83 who I am,
D84 um and
D85 it's kind of like, it's- it's kind of never end—
D86 **it's kind of never ending**,
D87 you know?

Example 22, Rachel

A89 as far as like my demisexuality goes,
A90 I know that
A91 that part of my identity as far as being like lumped in the LGBTQ is not →
A92 something that's easily understood

A93 or that many people have ever heard of?
A94 So **I feel like I'm constantly like**
A95 **trying to explain what that is**

Example 23, Leah

A183 Um and I'm not out at work in terms of like my gender identity
A184 or anything,
A185 so then **I have to like, argue for people to like, allow like**
A186 **these like different gendered identities?**
A187 And then they're like,
A188 *<mocking voice>* yeah, but like no one's really gonna respond. *</>*
A189 And I'm like, that's- this is why!
[...]
A303 so like at my job again, like **I have to like constantly sort of like**
A304 **pitch for people to try and be more inclusive?**

Bennett describes that he feels like he needs to “prove” (line D76) his bisexuality. He recalls being asked questions about his sexual activity to give evidence for his sexual identity. Rachel similarly discusses being tasked with “trying to explain what [her sexual identity] is” (line A95). Identifying as demisexual, Rachel notes that her identity is “not something that’s easily understood or that many people have ever heard of” (lines A92–93), which is why she finds herself in this situation as an educator or advocate for demisexuality. Leah takes on the advocacy role as well, but in her case, she finds herself having to “argue for people to like, allow like these like different gendered identities” (lines A185–186) and “pitch for people to try and be more inclusive” (line A304) in her workplace. She adds with an exasperated tone that her coworkers might react to these changes with “yeah, but like no one’s really gonna respond” (line A188) and that it is her responsibility to teach them that “this is why!” (line A189). The fact that participants see these explanatory acts as a sort of obligation is evidenced by both Bennett and Leah’s uses of deontic modal verbs (“have to,” lines D75 and A185). There is also a common theme of this obligation being incessant or perpetual. Bennett comments that “there’s this constant questioning” (line D82) and “it’s kind of never ending” (line D86). Rachel shares, “I feel like

I'm constantly like trying to explain what that is" (lines A94–95). Leah similarly notes, "I have to like constantly sort of like pitch for people to try and be more inclusive" (lines A303–304). Furthermore, like in the angry responses, exasperation is accentuated in part via the participants' use of emphatic prosody ("this is why!", line A189). As is clear in each of these examples, the need to either justify one's queerness or to explain queerness to a seemingly unenlightened audience is a common burden for these LGBTQ+ people, and one way to act on it is to try to educate—even if it leads to exasperation.

Whether participants respond with aggression or reluctant advocacy, exasperation is a common theme in these reflections. All of the examples show that participants are extremely dissatisfied with a specific aspect of their treatment as LGBTQ+ people. Specifically, there is a common theme of needing to explain oneself, often to unsympathetic listeners. The need to consistently prove, explain, or argue for—in other words, justify—the existence of LGBTQ+ identities comes up in several of these examples. When one's very "way of being human," to paraphrase Tannen (2005, p. 191) is under attack, it is no wonder that a common response would be exasperation. There is also a prevalent theme in these examples of feeling like an outsider as a queer person, such that if the participant does not say something, no one else will, and the ignorant public will never learn. Feeling excluded is therefore both a preceding factor in these situations and a consequence. Like minimization and fear, exasperation—and the proactive responses that tend to come with it—is an entirely valid reaction to exclusionary interactions.

DISCUSSION

This appraisal analysis has attempted to show that even the most mundane interactions can cause extreme emotional reactions, including fear and exasperation, and on the opposite end of the spectrum, interactions that appear to be exclusionary can be minimized by participants for

various reasons. As the analysis has shown, LGBTQ+ people experience subtle forms of exclusion that often seem to go unnoticed by the other people engaging in the interaction. These “subtle acts of exclusion” (Jana & Baran, 2020) on the basis of gender and sexual identity thus align with the definition of anti-queer microaggressions proposed by Vaccaro and Koob (2018)⁹. In participants’ reflections, these types of exclusionary acts came up regardless of setting, ranging from casual chats with friends and family to school and workplace encounters. All of these environments proved to be conducive to uncomfortable and even painful interactions, as long as some negative interpretation of participants’ identities was evoked. How participants chose to respond in the moment likely depended on both individual and interpersonal factors—for instance, some people are more comfortable engaging in confrontation than others, and some people will do so only in the context of an extremely close relationship. Regardless of how exactly the interaction transpired in the moment, what all of the examples have in common is that in the moment of reflection, participants used the linguistic resources available to them to demonstrate how they had been made to feel different. The feeling of being “different” exists only in relation to some shared standard of normal; it thus appears that in their evaluations, participants oriented to familiar discourses of what is or is not normal.

Throughout their metalinguistic evaluations of exclusionary everyday interactions, participants respond to both hetero- and homonormative ideals. Though none of the examples make use of these terms per se, the ideologies themselves come up a few times in participants’ reflections. Lynn (Example 18) alludes to a heteronormative standard when noting that she cannot talk openly about being gay the way that her colleagues can talk about being straight,

⁹ The definition is included again for the reader’s convenience: “the commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental forms of discrimination that, regardless of the perpetrator’s intent, disparage and oppress people who hold minoritized identities of sexuality and gender” (p. 1318).

without risking being pigeonholed as having no other character traits besides her sexuality.

Bennett (Example 5) explains how even his bisexual friend treated him in a way that invalidated his bisexual identity by insinuating that he should have been behaving like a stereotypical gay man, rather than embodying all of the complexities of his own sexuality. Homonormativity ascribes the same norms that govern heterosexual people (i.e., heteronormativity) to queer people. Queerness is often oversimplified to meet these demands, with white, cisgender, monogamous, married, gay male couples acting as a stand-in for all of the diversity that actually exists in the LGBTQ+ community. Bennett's story, in which his friend expected him to act like a stereotype instead of living authentically, shows an example not only of homonormativity, but of homonormativity being promoted by a fellow queer person. Because of the pervasiveness of these ideologies, normativity is thus a restraint that affects LGBTQ+ persons from both inside and outside of the queer community. This finding aligns with Jones' (2018a) conclusion that the members of the queer youth group she studied had been so influenced by these ideologies that they had internalized them. When one's identity is perceived primarily through a lens of normative discourses, invalidation and oversimplification of the identity in question are bound to occur, leading to harmful consequences. Subscribing to hetero- and homonormativity creates an environment that can easily descend into the territory of anti-queer microaggressions and feelings of exclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The reflections included in this appraisal analysis reveal at least three ways that LGBTQ+ persons deal with the harmful effects of exclusionary interactions after the fact. Participants mainly evaluated their interactions in terms of: minimization, in which participants reframed the interaction as not worthy of concern; fear, in which participants expressed how an interaction made them worry about a potential negative outcome; and exasperation, in which participants

demonstrated their dissatisfaction with an interaction in the form of either anger or frustration. Oteíza (2017) asserts that appraisal analysis “aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical and descriptive systematization of the linguistic resources that can be used to construe the value of social experience, and thereby to achieve a richer understanding of the patterns of interpersonal meaning beyond the manifestation of only emotionality across discourse” (p. 458). In other words, examining the use of evaluative language can tell us both what value speakers place on the experience they describe and how speakers engage in intersubjective meaning-making in the moment of evaluation. I would like to propose that the reflections that took place in the focus groups, in which participants recounted and evaluated disagreeable and invalidating encounters, may have served as a powerful source of identity affirmation.

Each of the three approaches participants took in evaluating their interactions served as a distinct tool for reframing the way that they had been treated and the way that they responded to this treatment. In the first grouping of reflections (minimization), participants actively used mitigating language to diminish the power these negative interactions have had over them. In the second grouping (fear), participants were able to freely express the emotions they had previously withheld for reasons of self-protection. In the third grouping (exasperation), participants managed to proactively take the situation into their own hands by contesting whatever it was that had caused them to feel excluded. Each of these approaches allowed participants to think about how the moment had affected them and how they had handled it, perhaps also giving rise to thoughts about how they could have handled it differently, and why. These three approaches can thus be thought of as discursive coping mechanisms for LGBTQ+ persons who have been routinely subjected to marginalization. There are indeed various ways for queer people to negotiate normative standards and expectations, which can be direct or indirect, and external or

internal. It may seem at first that if no one in an interaction speaks up and voices a problem, then nothing has gone wrong. Hopefully, this analysis has shown, among other things, that this is not the case; participants who have been excluded often choose not to engage in a discussion, sometimes precisely because of the discomfort the situation has already caused. Through the reevaluation process that took place in the focus groups, participants were given a chance to share their thoughts and feelings about these interactions, which might not have been possible beforehand. Ideally, such coping mechanisms would not be necessary, but in an ideal world, LGBTQ+ people would not have to face anti-queer microaggressions at all. Exclusionary interactions generally involve some negative portrayal of the LGBTQ+ person's identity. Taking control of the situation, either in the moment of the interaction or in an evaluation of the interaction after the fact, thus gives these LGBTQ+ individuals the chance to renegotiate the way they have been portrayed and construct their identities in a different light.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have shown three ways that LGBTQ+ people respond to exclusionary everyday interactions: minimization, fear, and exasperation. I have used appraisal theory and sociocultural linguistics to analyze participants' perceptions of their own experiences of exclusion and the resultant constructions of their identities. I have also suggested a reading of participants' reflections and evaluations of negative experiences as a way for them to contend with the exclusion they have faced.

At its core, this study was intended to explore how everyday experiences can foster either inclusion or exclusion for LGBTQ+ people. In the focus groups, I asked the participants about experiences in which their queerness felt salient in general terms; however, over the course of the study, it became clear that for the vast majority of participants, the interactions that came to mind

were ones which had negatively affected them. The question may remain of what can be done to alleviate the distress caused by such experiences and to foster inclusivity in daily interactions. Being a mindful participant in any conversation is an important and necessary first step, especially having an awareness of anti-queer microaggressions and the impacts of normative expectations. Yet, sometimes people with the best intentions still make mistakes. Awareness alone is not sufficient to fundamentally alter the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and eliminate the possibility of exclusion. For this reason, one important avenue for future research would be to explore what kinds of pathways to repair would be preferable in these scenarios. If exclusionary acts are inevitable, perpetrators must learn how to thoughtfully rectify the situation, and bystanders witnessing the exclusionary act must learn to acknowledge the harm as well. Sometimes, there is no clear perpetrator, especially in cases where it is uncertain whether or not an exclusionary act has indeed occurred. In these cases, intentionally providing an affirming or validating environment can help avert the exclusion before it happens. The burden of increasing the comfort level of LGBTQ+ people—or members of any marginalized group—in everyday interactions should not rest solely on their shoulders.

Studies of anti-queer microaggressions still remain sparse, but they are crucial if we wish to progress towards a future in which exclusionary acts are recognized by not only their victims, but their perpetrators as well. This study has aimed to contribute to this growing body of research by, first, detailing how the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals is reported in retellings of everyday micro-interactions, and second, demonstrating how LGBTQ+ individuals' reflections on these interactions reveal some of the ways that they conceptualize their own exclusion, internalize it, and respond to it in identity-affirming ways.

APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Adapted from: Tannen, D., Kendall, S., & Gordon, C. (Eds.) (2007). *Family Talk: Discourse and Identity in Four American Families*. Oxford University Press.

return	Each new line represents an intonation unit.
→	An arrow indicates that the intonation unit continues onto the next line.
–	A dash indicates a truncated intonation unit.
-	A hyphen indicates a truncated word or adjustment within an intonation unit, e.g., repeated word, false start.
?	A question mark indicates a relatively strong rising intonation.
.	A period indicates a falling, final intonation.
,	A comma indicates a continuing intonation.
!	An exclamation point indicates emphatic stress.
<laughs>	Angle brackets enclose descriptions of vocal noises, e.g., laughs, coughs.
<laughing>words>	Angle brackets enclose descriptions of the manner in which an utterance is spoken, e.g., high-pitched, laughing, incredulous.

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

1. Understandings of what it means to be LGBTQ+ differ from person to person. Please share what this identity means to you in your life.
2. Can you think of any times in which you felt your LGBTQ+ identity was making you stand out in a conversation?
 - a. How would you describe that experience and the way it made you feel?
3. Can you think of any times in which you could tell that the people you were talking with were aware of your LGBTQ+ identity? How did you know?
 - a. How did they treat you in that moment?
4. When you are with your family (immediate or extended), do you ever notice your LGBTQ+ identity come up in conversation, either explicitly or implicitly?
5. When you are at school or work, do you ever notice your LGBTQ+ identity come up in conversation, either explicitly or implicitly?
6. When you are with your closest friends (i.e., the friends who know you best, and with whom you feel most like yourself) do you ever notice your LGBTQ+ identity come up in conversation, either explicitly or implicitly?
7. Have you noticed similarities and differences between conversations with someone who shares your identity, versus someone who does not?
 - a. Describe the similarities and differences.
8. When your LGBTQ+ identity comes up in conversation either implicitly or explicitly, how do you respond?
 - a. Does your internal reaction match your external behavior?
 - b. Does your reaction depend on the circumstances of the interaction?
9. Do you ever feel that your own perception of your identity is in any way influenced by or related to the types of interactions you have in which your identity is salient?

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