

# Introduction

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This special issue of the Humboldt Journal of Social Relations (HJSR) examines U.S. culture and politics after the marriage equality tipping point. In 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees the right to marry to same-sex couples (as it does to opposite-sex couples). Many queer activists have been concerned that the focus on marriage equality would take away from other queer social movements, or fundamentally change queer norms and institutions. Therefore, this issue of the HJSR explores whether that has happened post *Obergefell*. In other words, has marriage equality, as sanctioned by the Supreme Court, detracted the country from social and political concerns related to various queer communities? Has it reinforced what queer theorist Lisa Duggan (2003) coined “homonormativity” or a normative version of what it means to be queer? In addition, the issue delves into the question of “what is next for queers in the U.S.?” To answer these questions, we present a unique panoply of contributions across myriad media, including: peer-reviewed articles that utilize different methodologies; notes from activists in the front lines of queer movements; oral histories from gender non-conforming college students; a zine that focuses on trans\* and gender non-conformity issues; an infographic and series of oral histories (in video format) that explore gender nonconformity on a college campus; a videorecorded interview of a noted interdisciplinary sociologist by one of the co-managing editors of this issues, and; reviews of three books that studied non-mainstream queer communities.

As we consider the contents of this issue, we recognize three interwoven themes: 1) the dichotomy between legal equality and lived equality; 2) systemic barriers that exist for queer people of color and trans people, and; 3) issues that relate to those who do not fit in the mainstream gay community, such as gender non-conforming people. In his speech delivered at Equality Utah Allies Dinner in 2015 (reprinted in this issue), Troy Williams celebrates marriage equality as a crucial victory. However, he stresses that the work of the LGBTQ community is not complete “until all people are equal under the law.” In particular, he singles out four priorities of focus--trans health insurance, hate crime legislation, public accommodation, and conversion therapy ban--or areas in which members of the community are still experiencing inequality.

Furthermore, as Brandie Balken notes in her essay, legal equality—the “legislative and litigation strategy for inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity into all laws providing and protecting equal access”—is now a familiar goal to many Americans. Indeed, the *Obergefell* decision is seen as an achievement of such equality. Lived equality, however, is arguably different and more difficult to achieve. In Teal and Conover-Williams’s article, “Homophobia without Homophobes”, the authors argue that even with the achievement of marriage equality, queer Americans still do not experience lived equality--or equality in how queer people (vs. non-queer peers) actually experience the world. They provide rich examples from public discourse (e.g. television, film, and popular music) to support the theory that heterosexism is maintained through various modern forms of homophobia: naturalization,

cultural homophobia, and minimization of homophobia. For instance, the authors discuss the lack of male bisexuality shown in popular discourse; society puts an inordinate amount of pressure on men to maintain a “heterosexual identity”, and in doing so, it sustains the heterosexism that exists in our culture.

In her article, Onishenko explores the disconnect between legal and lived equality in a different context. Her qualitative study focuses on LGBTQ individuals who marry same-sex partners in Canada to understand the impact of the country’s Equal Marriage Charter. The findings emphasize how same-sex couples, in seeking access to a conventional institution--marriage--became willingly or, in some cases, unwillingly politicized in the public discourse. Onishenko concludes that the the Equal Marriage Charter challenged the equality discourse, and in doing so, it subsequently became a communicative function for the LGBTQ Canadians and provided a possibility for transformation for those individuals.

In their zine, Liza Olmedo explores more concrete disparities between legal and lived equality by visually and textually exploring “now what?” after marriage equality. They shape their zine as an activist scholar to be a handbook for academics inside and out of queer movements as much as queer individuals. For example, they show how LGBTQ youth are impacted by issues of homelessness, and give suggestions for youth who may find themselves experiencing homelessness. Through images, poetry and essays, they explore issues of gender non-conformity and the lack of inclusion within and between queer communities.

Conover-Williams and Chang’s study further substantiates the disparity between legal and lived equality for queer people. They note that marriage equality does not address other social institutions that sexual minority persons must navigate, such as school and religion. One of the results of the Conover-Williams and Chang quantitative analysis is that the effect of religion as a protective factor from selling drugs is not as strong on sexual minority youths and adults as it is for their sexual majority counterparts. Their study further suggests

that, across the life course, the effects of religions of gender are stronger than sexual minority status.

In addition to the issue of legal vs. lived equality, certain groups, such as trans people and people of color, in the queer community face unique systemic barriers. In particular, Shultz and Shultz conclude that trans individuals in queer relationships may find it difficult to reconcile disparate aspects of their identities. Using a combined method of autoethnography and oral history, the authors seek to highlight and understand the discordant political priorities (compared to the mainstream LGBT community) that trans people may have. While some “accommodationist LGBT victories have been secured” (i.e. marriage equality), the concern is that the political goals unique to trans people (e.g. decriminalizing public sex and ending the pathologization of gender dysphoria) will remain difficult to achieve. One of the books reviewed in this issue echo a similar sentiment. The personal narratives in *Queer Brown Voices* describe the political oppression and the lack of social validation for 1970’s-1990’s queer Brown activists. Many of the contributors struggle with gaining legitimacy for their activism in the mainstream culture because they came from low-income backgrounds and their families were often migrant workers who spoke little English. While this edited volume covers the efforts of the liberation movement for queer Brown people, it remains the case that queer movements today are still mostly dominated by Eurocentrism and sexism. *Queer Brown Voices* touches on many of the same themes of inclusion and exclusion explored in Olmedo’s zine.

In a similar vein, what happens to those who are not part of the mainstream (i.e. white, male, and cisgender) queer community after marriage equality? How might the non-mainstream members, such as those who are gender non-conforming or intersex, fit into the political and social agendas of the queer community? In their study, Smith and Smith analyze survey data on gender identity gathered from a university population. In particular, they seek to understand how the

complex interactions that occur between self-meanings, perceptions, and behaviors related to gender and gender non-conformity. The authors find that the lived experiences of those who are outside the gender binary are distinctly different than those who conform to defined gender roles. More specifically, those who are outside of the gender binary in more intimate ways (i.e. being recognized as gender non-conforming and/or being a romantic relationship with someone who is gender non-conforming) are more likely to view the world as more dangerous and less inclusive.

Further examining the potential boundaries of gender and gender non-conformity, a college campus group of undergraduate and graduate students (Mournier and colleagues) explore the experiences of gender non-conforming students on a college campus. They give us a series of six oral histories, and an infographic showing the results of their recent action research project with gender non-conforming students on their campus. They find most students have some familiarity with gender non-conformity, though they often experience misgendering, or being called by the wrong pronouns. Interestingly, whether or not they identify as gender non-conforming, students express and explain their gender with a wide variety of language. Among the students who do identify as gender non-conforming, they wish their campus had better staff and faculty training, gender neutral bathrooms, and more safe spaces, especially for students of color.

The other two book reviews focus on two groups that also do not fit neatly into the queer community: intersex people and big gay men. In *Contesting Intersex*, the author discusses the struggles that intersex people face, particularly in fighting for proper treatments in a medical profession and intersex community that have yet to agree on proper terminologies. The book, *Fat Gay Men*, is a look into Girth and Mirthers—a club for big gay men to reconfigure the unique stigmas of weight and sexual identity that they face by creating “subaltern within the subaltern” of society. Like intersex people, these men experience marginalization and exclusion from both the

heteronormative and LGBT mainstreams and their ideal conceptions of desirable body images and sexual orientations.

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