

Over the Rainbow:

Testimonies of LGBTQ Individuals
and the Population's Reaction

By

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DEFINITIONS

Aromantic	Someone who has no romantic attraction to any gender
Asexual	Someone who has no sexual attraction to any gender
Bisexual	Refers to someone who has sexual attraction to both sexes (male and female)
Gay	Mainly refers to men, but some women use this term interchangeably with lesbian. *see homosexual
Gender Expression	The physical representation of how an individual mentally identifies as their gender
Homosexual	Refers to anyone, regardless of gender, who is attracted to someone with the same gender
Lesbian	A woman who identifies as homosexual
LGBTQ	Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. This acronym is an umbrella term covering all identities

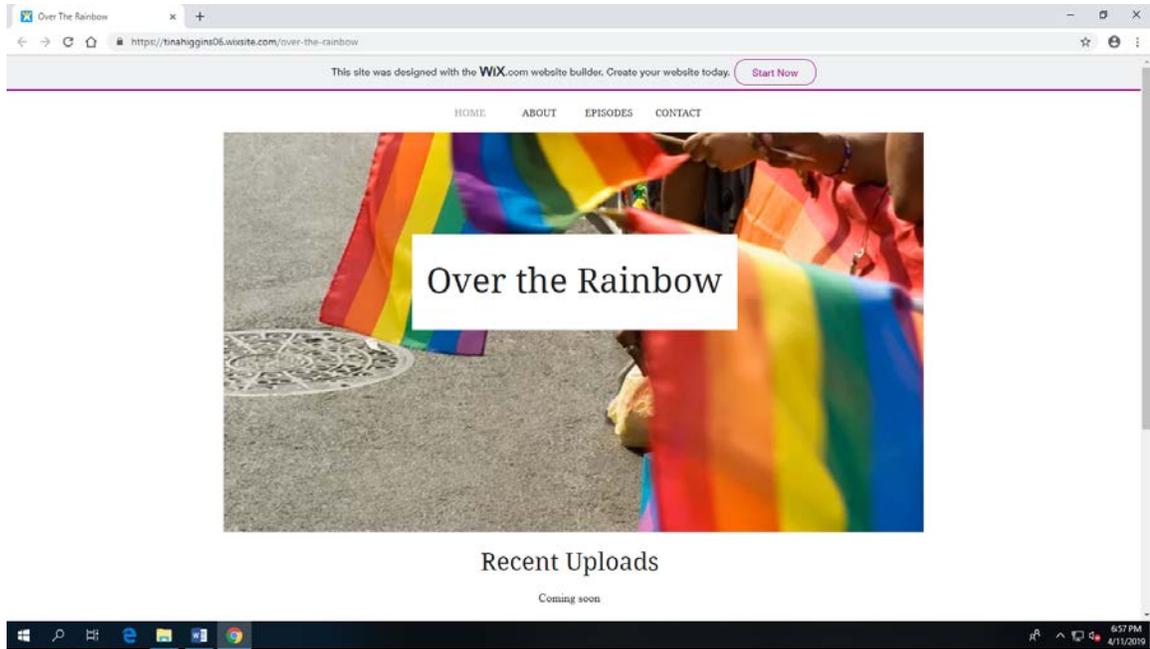
Sexual Identity

within this subculture even if they aren't represented by one of the letters.

The specific sexuality that one characterizes with within the LGBTQ community

WEBSITE

<https://tinahiggins06.wixsite.com/over-the-rainbow>



ABSTRACT:

This creative thesis is a podcast that focuses on issue in the LGBTQ community. The host interviewed queer individuals with different identities and observed major historical events in the queer community and how those affected Middle Tennessee. The idea of making a podcast surrounding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community and topics within the subculture is important because some young adults do not have an outlet that shares that they are not alone in their queer journey. An outlet is not only important for their journey, but it is also crucial in supporting their mental health. Podcasts are particularly useful in reaching the LGBTQ community because of the mobile apps.

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PART 1:

Project Introduction

ROLES OF PODCASTS IN THE MEDIA

Podcasts are increasing in popularity, reach, and influence. As of 2017, the listening audience grew 11% from 2016, and at least 112 million Americans listen to podcasts today (Shadpour). This increase is partially due to the low cost of producing and one's ability to access them on any device that allows audio content. Not only are they easily obtainable, but podcasts are also effortless to take a part in. A listener can tune in through any music playing application to listen. Today, internet users can be both consumers and creators of podcasts. With the dramatic increase in popularity, podcasts are quickly becoming the fastest growing and most prominent form of audio storytelling.

One of the most interesting things about podcasts is that they can be based on just about any subject matter imaginable – sports, relationships, culture, comedy, storytelling, journalism, poetry, music, etc. Creators are only limited in this medium by their own creativity. According to an articles by FastCompany and Variety (2018) there are currently, as of April 25, 2018, “over 525,000 active [podcast] shows and over 18.5 million episodes” (Ross) in existence and they include content in over 100 languages. The article shares that the majority of listeners either enjoy podcasts at home, 49%, or in their car, 22% (Ross). The distribution of audience by gender is about equal with women listening to 44% of podcasts and men listening to 56 %. This is what makes podcasts a strategically sound venue to reach my targeted audience of the LGBTQ community and especially youth who are struggling with their identities and sexual orientations.

PODCAST DESCRIPTION

Youth members of the LGBTQ community can listen to a podcast for them through their headphones in front of anyone and not be afraid of discovery. According to a study held by the American Public Health Association, they found that LGBTQ members who suppress their sexuality are more at risk of psychological distress thus preventing them from engaging in group based coping activities (McLaughlin). The first season focuses primarily on the coming out process. The podcast acts as a bonding agent between people identifying their sexuality and being confident in it. The podcast is published on Soundcloud as well as a Wix website.

Again, the focus of season one is the coming out process because this is a pivotal moment in the lives of many LGBTQ people. The coming out process is when a queer person feels comfortable identifying within the LGBTQ spectrum, and they wish to make it public. Some individuals never come out of the closet, and some others do it while they are young. This process varies from person to person. The podcast does not intend for the work to glamorize the coming out process. It is a sensitive time in a queer person's life, and will be treated as such. The first season of my podcast is the one submitted as a creative thesis. In these episodes, host Tina Higgins invites someone who has a relationship within the LGBTQ community to be her guests. This further creates a bond between herself and the listeners on the theme of that they are not alone.

The LGBTQ community struggles with homophobia on a daily basis. Homophobia is the dislike or prejudice against homosexual individuals. The gay community has experienced some type of prejudice since the beginning of civilization, but the criminal aspects have been made apparent in the modern era via media coverage.

According to the *Tennessean*, hate crimes have increased through the state within the year 2018 (Allison). The legal definition of a hate crime varies from state to state because “a hate crime is usually defined by state law as one that involves threats, harassment, or physical harm and is motivated by prejudice against someone's race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation or physical or mental disability” (US). Within Tennessee, the lines are blurred as to what classifies as a hate crime and what does not strictly due to the perpetrator's motive. Although the acceptance of the gay community has improved, homophobia still exists and with it the hate that comes with homophobia. Hate crimes torment members of the LGBTQ community of all ages. Homophobia, hate crimes, and the lack of public support for LGBTQ are issues that create disruptive and disrespectful ideologies within our present day society.

This project is also a representation of queer theory. Queer theory is a form of academic research that rejects the stereotypes of gender expression and sexuality. My theory with this research lies within my thesis statement: confidence of one’s sexual identity or gender expression is influenced by their support system. My project shows, through my one-on-one interviews with queer individuals, this theory being proven.

LGBTQ HISTORY

The LGBTQ community has made many gains, but it has not come peacefully. In 2006, the FBI collected data that 15.6% of hate crimes are focused on homophobia (“Advocate”). Although the queer community still faces homophobia and prejudice, it was more intense in the past. The first documented gay rights organization in the United States was founded by Henry Gerber in 1924, and it was called the Society for Human Rights (“Box”). This society soon disbanded due to political pressures, and what Gerber described as an “up against a solid wall of ignorance, hypocrisy, meanness, and corruption” (“Box”). Then only four years later, Radclyffe Hall published the first lesbian novel thus making homosexuality a topic of everyday conversation in both the United States and in England.

As the Holocaust took place in 1945, homosexuals remained in Nazi concentration camps even after liberation. They were trapped in these camps by allied forces because they believed “homosexual relations between males to be illegal along with acts such as underage sex abuse and bestiality” (“Box”). Five years after this event, Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society which is one of the oldest LGBTQ activist groups in the United States. Their goal, even in today's times, is to break the prejudice, victimization, abuse, and isolation people of the LGBTQ community experience.

On June 28, 1969, there was a police raid at the Stonewall Inn that targeted the gay community, and this was the beginning of the Stonewall Riots along with other riots of the gay community against law enforcement. This was a monumental moment for the equal rights movement regarding LGBTQ equality. For example, during this time it was illegal and police could arrest an individual who was wearing clothing not gender

“appropriate.” Queer individuals would flock to gay bars for a place of refuge, and one popular bar in New York was the Stonewall Inn. Homosexuality was still illegal in New York, so in order to protect the individuals in this bar the mafia owned it and would persuade cops to turn the other way. This did not completely protect the queer individuals because some would be targeted and fined or even arrested for solicitation of homosexuality. In the morning hours of the Stonewall police raid, law enforcement entered the establishment, but they were met with resistance by both customers and protesters outside. This angry mob turned into thousands and ended with the bar engulfed in flames (History). The riots and protests regarding this incident lasted for nearly an additional week. This was the start of the gay liberation movement, and this moment marks the beginning of the modern day LGBTQ community.

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders which further proved to the population of this time that homosexuality is not a mental illness. In 1986, however, the progress was halted by the Bowers v. Hardwick case in which the Supreme court ruled that the constitution allows states to pass and enforce sodomy laws targeting homosexuals. It was not until 2003 that this case was bypassed when the “U.S Supreme Court ruled in Lawrence v Texas that sodomy laws in the U.S are unconstitutional” (Stein).

In 2009 President Obama signed the Hate Crimes Prevention Act which states that crimes are motivated by the victim’s true or perceived gender, sexual orientation, or disability are to be prosecuted under the Federal Hate Crime Law. In 2015, under President Obama’s term the U.S Supreme Court ruled that gay marriage is a right that is protected by the U.S. constitution in all 50 states. This ruling made gay marriage legal

everywhere in America. Even with this progress, numerous hate crimes are still being withstood by the LGBTQ community.

The LGBTQ subculture is expanding ever more rapidly both in social development and in member size (A Timeline). Along with its expansion, there have been more opinions circulating regarding the community, some positive and others negative. My thesis combines the two and shows how the positive opinions help mute the negative. Still, there is an increased amount of suicides, bullying, and hate crimes experienced by people who are a part of this subculture. According to the *Speak for Them* project, 30% of gay youths attempt suicide before the age of 15, nearly 1,500 queer individuals committed suicide in 2016, and nine out of ten teens have reported being bullied strictly due to either their sexual orientation, their gender identity, or both (CDC). The majority of individuals in the LGBTQ community deal with daily prejudice either with strangers or with loved ones.

Over the Rainbow is a safe place for LGBTQ youths and other individuals to go if they are feeling oppressed in their lives. Through personal experience, I know what I needed to hear and wanted to know that other people like me were out there when I was coming out of the closet. The main area that the podcast would like to focus on would be towards southern conservative states. In the South, it is difficult identifying within the LGBTQ community. The enforcement of religion and “traditional” values affects the confidence of many individual’s futures about what their life will be like after coming out. Southern youths do not always feel comfortable or safe being open in their sexual orientation or gender identity. This does more harm than good, and this is why my

podcast will be an aid to people in the South, especially, ones who are exploring on coming to terms with their queer identities.

PART 2

Thesis Statement

Over the Rainbow serves as an escape and outlet for youths in Middle Tennessee and around the world. Individuals within the LGBTQ community need to express their opinion in a safe environment, and I have brought this idea to the surface through my podcast. My podcast will continue after my research project ends; however, only the first season of my podcast are presented for this thesis project.

Methodology

PURPOSE

This creative research project and podcast provides information of the LGBTQ community from actual queer people. These podcast episodes features testimonies and feelings that are often overlooked by the general population. *Over the Rainbow* focuses on one-on-one interviews about the coming out process of individuals from different sexual identities. These include homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. In comparison to queer blogs or other mediums, podcasts listeners to immerse themselves in the entertainment in public while also listening in the privacy of their headphones. A podcast audience can simply listen to content without reading or requiring a visual stimulant. Episodes can be listened to on their work commute, in their home, or during their workouts.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The intended audience for *Over the Rainbow* is female, male, and non-binary people around the ages of 15 to 35 who are involved in the LGBTQ community. This also includes queer allies. The podcast is focused on a journalistic atmosphere. The personal narrative provide information without being overwhelming. *Over the Rainbow* consists of testimonies of queer interviewees as well as an episode focusing on the history of the LGBTQ community and how it affected southern states, specifically Tennessee.

EPISODES

Over the Rainbow consists of one introductory episode and four regular podcast episodes. The episodes are diverse in their information and content provided depending on the interviewee and their coming out experience. The interview episodes are the first three episodes. These episodes range from sixteen to twenty minutes in length, and the fourth episode focuses on the history of the LGBTQ community which is approximately twenty minutes long.

Episode one involves a one-on-one interview with Olivia Kersey. She identifies as gay and discusses her coming out story. Along with how a southern community perceives gay women, this episode also discusses the crucial role that religion plays in southern culture. In episode two, the podcast has another one-on-one interview with Emily Tyo. She identifies as bisexual, and in this episode, she discusses stigmas that are often attached to the bisexual identity. This theme bleeds into episode three. Episode three is the last podcast that has a one-on-one interview. Sydney Blunschi is an asexual student at MTSU, and she explains that many people she meets have a misrepresentation of

asexuals and aromantics. The last episode of *Over the Rainbow* dissects the history of the gay liberation movement and its absorption in Middle Tennessee.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Every podcast episode was uploaded on SoundCloud in order to make it accessible to the public. After it was posted there, the link was shared on a wix website specified for *Over the Rainbow*. The website also has links to access other social media for the podcast: Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. The overall purpose for creating these social media platforms was to reach my target audience to gain traffic and support for *Over the Rainbow*.

EQUIPMENT

The equipment used to construct this podcast included a laptop with the Audacity program installed and a Tascam. Audacity is an audio editing program that was used in all of the episodes to edit them. A Tascam is a portable microphone that was used to record all the voice overs and interviews.

PART 3

Podcast Descriptions

EPISODE 0

Episode 0 is the preview episode of the podcast. Like other mediums of entertainment, movies and television shows, podcasts also have a trailer. In this preview episode, the host explains her personal coming out story. Her story is crucial to share with the audience to create a bond between listener and host. This shows that they are personal as well as a queer individual. In this episode, host Tina Higgins explains who she is, and why she made this podcast. She also explains what future episodes of the podcast will entail, as well as answers some questions that viewers may ask in later episodes on the podcast.

EPISODE 1

In the first episode, host Tina Higgins invites her first guest on the show. Olivia is Tina's girlfriend who also identifies as gay. The episode starts with the introduction to the podcast, and then an introduction of Olivia Kersey. They both the difficulty of the coming out process in the South, religion's effect on queer individuals, and any troubles or stigmas that she faces today while being openly gay. The podcast concludes with Olivia giving advice for gay listeners, and Tina leading into the topic that episode two will cover.

EPISODE 2

In the second episode, host Tina Higgins dives into the coming out process for bisexuals. This experience is shared by guest Emily Tyo. She had a simple and easy coming out experience in the South. This episode covers topics like the stigma of

bisexuality, the public view of the sexual identity, and the importance of personal acceptance. Like all the episodes, this one ends with Emily giving advice for bisexual listeners, and Tina leads into the topic of next week's episode.

EPISODE 3

Episode three covers the sexual and romantic identity of asexuals and aromantics. Guest Sydney Blunski is a student at Middle Tennessee State University and LGBTQ activist who identifies as asexual and aromantic. She explains that coming out as asexual is different than any other sexual identity. Sydney explains how the internet was a helpful to her, as were her close friends, while she was coming out. This podcast also explains issues like misunderstanding asexuality, representation of asexuality in the media, as well as the lack of resources for asexuals and aromantics.

EPISODE 4

The final episode does not contain a one-on-one interview. Instead, host Tina Higgins explains the queer history of Murfreesboro, TN. With help from the MTSU Albert Gore Sr. Research Center, Tina mirrors major events in LGBTQ history and how they affected the culture in Middle Tennessee. She covers two major events in this episode: the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS epidemic.

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