

Life During Pandemic Times



Book Five from
2SLGBTQ+ Community & Life During a Global Pandemic:
A Resistance Based Photovoice Collective

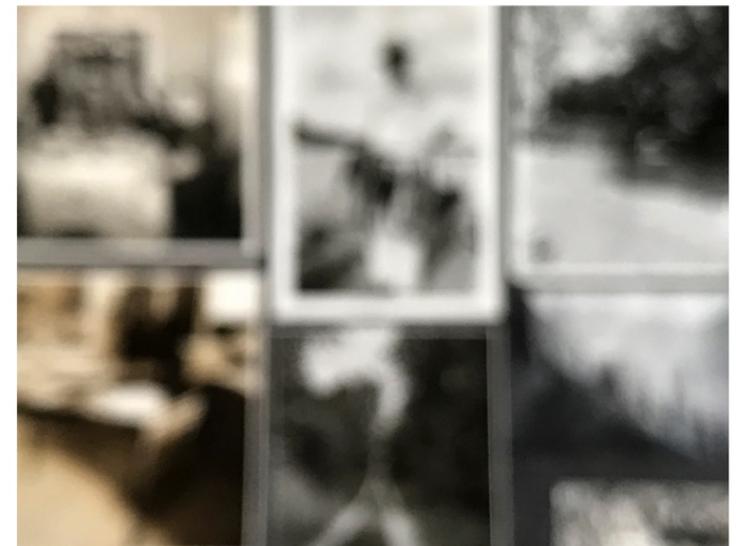
By

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Communities of Brantford and the
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This digital book is the fifth in a series of five books.

This book examines the final theme in a larger photovoice research project that investigated the experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ people with community during the COVID-19 pandemic. As community engaged research, the photographers who submitted images acted as participant researchers, which means that they both submitted images as participants in the study as well as contributed to the thematic analysis of the images as researchers during Community Cafés (small group online meetings).



(stock image)

2SLGBTQ+ Community and Life

The four previous books document several themes of the research. The first book explored the effects of cis-heteronormative bias on the 2SLGBTQ+ community and experiences of exclusion. The second examined the ways that the participant researchers challenged cis-heteronormativity in their daily lives. The third book discussed the community priorities identified by the participant researchers for dismantling cis-heteronormativity in society. The fourth book outlined the varied meanings of community to the participant researchers.

Life during Pandemic Times

This book will look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the participant researchers during the first 10 months of the pandemic. Of the 14 participant researchers, 13 talked about COVID-19 and the effects it had on their lives.

As recent research has shown, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been hard hitting, especially for vulnerable populations. In this photovoice research study, the 2SLGBTQ+ participant researchers discussed many of the challenges they faced in the early stages of the pandemic and four prominent sub-themes were identified: wearing masks; experiencing worries, fear and uncertainty; coping with loss and isolation through resiliency; as well as connecting with and supporting community.

1. The Politics of Masks: Visibility and Invisibility

The most prominent sub-theme within the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic was the incorporation of mask wearing.

Masks were for protection and public safety but were also a political act of resistance used by some to show pride and allyship in and with 2SLGBTQ+ populations and to create visibility.

For others, as discussed during Community Cafés, masks brought the ability to be invisible, which was important because, for some 2SLGBTQ+ people, invisibility is the key to survival.

However, invisibility can also be problematic because it risks erasure of 2SLGBTQ+ identities. Masks have the potential to obscure faces and undo efforts people have made to present themselves in ways that reflect their identities.

Pride and the Pandemic: Visibility Matters



(Photo by Jean Turner, 2020).

In this photo arrangement, there are three examples of mask wearing.

Jean took the opportunity to publicly express her pride and represent her identity by wearing a Pride mask, noting that others “who see the mask might feel their own sense of pride or draw strength from the fact that others in their community identify the same way.” Jean’s heterosexual, cisgender friends and allies, Scott (a retired police officer) and his partner Christina proudly wear their Pride flag masks. For Jean, this is a strong visible demonstration of their support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, raising awareness and normalizing ally support, which she believes has a strong positive effect on the community and other straight, cisgender people around them. The final photo is of Reggie, Scott’s 8-year-old son, who identifies as heterosexual, male, and cisgender. Jean stated that Reggie wearing the Pride mask tells her as a 2SLGBTQ+ person that his family is likely supportive and that Reggie has normalized queer identities in his own mind. Jean shared that this photo was inspiring causing her to feel hopeful because Reggie’s generation “was open to not only accepting but publicly supporting the 2SLGBTQ+ community.”

I Fight for Justice



(Photo by Steph, 2020).

Steph shared this image of a mask that represented her “rage against interpersonal and structural violence.” Steph was worried because what is not visible in the photo is that the person is kicking Donald Trump. Steph said that while she was excited when she saw the mask and purchased it because “it signified resistance against the violence racialized 2SLGBTQ+ people experience,” she was also sometimes afraid to wear it outside because she felt worried that people will say it is violent.

Steph stated “The mask is symbolic as Trump represents white supremacy, racialized capitalism, and other forms of harm. The 2SLGBTQ+ community experience daily oppression and we deserve better. We deserve justice, liberation, safety, equity and all opportunities to live in our humanity and to live as authentically as possible. Violence against 2SLGBTQ+ people has a long and ongoing colonial history. 2SLGBTQ+ folks are othered and othering is used to entrench systems of domination. Positioning someone outside the norm is a conscious and unconscious way to ensure one group has access to power and another does not. We have to resist. Homophobia and transphobia are not in the past and we have so much work to do.”

The New Normal



(Photo by by Willow Curry and Courtney Curry, 2020).

Willow works in healthcare and discussed the importance of wearing masks but also noted that “queer people and especially trans people have a hard time valuing their appearance due to prejudice and discrimination.”

She said there is little need for makeup other than eyeliner and stated: “I practically live in a mask these days between work and our new normal, and it has a way of stripping one’s identity and undoing the strides I’ve made to wear my face unashamed. My smile took a long time to wear proudly and confidently and is now obscured any time I face the world. Appearance is more than how people see us, it’s how we see ourselves, and time spent hiding that appearance we struggle to find pride with is as familiar as the closet we once found ourselves trapped in.”

2. COVID-19 Worries, Fear, and Uncertainty

Participant researchers described feeling worry, fear, and uncertainty related to COVID-19 and not knowing what the pandemic would cause to happen nor how long it would last.

These worries were particularly prominent for those who themselves had health conditions and lived alone and for those who had friends who had health conditions and lived alone.

Life is Beautiful



(Photo by Willow Curry and Courtney Curry, 2020).

The photo, "Life is Beautiful," captures feelings of fear. As Willow and Courtney describe, "We had a lot of worries and uncertainties that night, and the coming thunderstorm was the cherry on top. The sign was just ironic. It's hard to feel 'life is beautiful' in our sometimes ugly world. It's hard to feel security, for so many of us."

Darkness Looms



(Photo by Tes Foster, 2020).

The photo, "Darkness Looms," represents the idea of something dark coming ahead and fear and uncertainty. COVID-19 is looming, and we do not know what is going to happen next, other than things might get worse and it's scary.

Tes explains: "COVID-19 has affected everyone and every community. Brantford and other communities were not able to have their Pride events, which often join people together. So many bad things have come from COVID-19, and everyone is scared. It's an uncomfortable and uncontrollable virus, and we cannot change what has happened. Scary things come, and we cannot control them. Yes, dark clouds and storms are scary, but we just need the equipment to help let the rain and storm pass, which might take some time. All we can do is protect each other and everyone else; as mentioned before, we cannot control this virus. We need to be safe."

3. Coping with Loss and Isolation and Being Resilient

Loss, isolation, coping, and resiliency are not new to 2SLGBTQ+ populations; however, they are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings show that loss was experienced through the absence of Pride events; the inability to be physically close with friends; and the loss of community, family, home, autonomy, identity, and life.

Photographers discussed coping in healthy and unhealthy ways and displayed resiliency through their coping strategies.

All Work, No Pride.



(Photo by Willow Curry and Courtney Curry, 2020).

Willow and Courtney noted that June is Pride Month. It is the only month out of the year that local 2SLGBTQ+ people are accessible to them. With all events cancelled, and it being a public health concern to gather, what is supposed to be a month of community, celebration, and protest was lost, put off another year.

Willow stated: "I don't feel anyone anticipated the year 2020 has been, but the quarantine has affected every aspect of our lives, even our ability to celebrate ourselves together. Sacrificing dances, marches, and celebrations is what we need to and are willing to do so that we can keep our community safe for future Pride Months to come." We all "must be strong and continue to use safer means of reaching out and showing the strength of our community to reflect a family. This year is a learning experience for the next, and we queers are quite resilient in learning and overcoming."

Holding On



(Photo by Mabe Kyle, 2020).

Mabe submitted this photo to represent the many young 2SLGBTQ+ people who may be living “at the brink of their homes and struggling to hold on,” noting that the pandemic has been difficult for many young 2SLGBTQ+ people having to live with families or people who are not accepting of them. Many young 2SLGBTQ+ people who had to move home during the pandemic may have experienced a loss of their social community and support systems, and they may then have also compounded their loss in having to hide their emerging identities. Home and feeling at home are complex within the 2SLGBTQ+ community because of a lack of understanding and acceptance from cis-heterosexual people. Mabe felt that it was important for people to know the difficulties many 2SLGBTQ+ people face whether or not they are out to their families and that we can support community organizations that work with youth like LGBT Youthline.

I Feel Loss



(Photo by Steph, 2020).

Of the time this photo was taken, Steph said: "I was exhausted, not taking care of myself, not eating, drinking too much. This is all that I had left in the fridge. I remember feeling shame that I lost control of my life. Life is hard, and many people are struggling. 2SLGBTQ+ folks can experience a lot of loss in a world not made by or for them. Loss of family, loss of home, loss of autonomy, loss of identity, loss of life. We live in binaries and have very narrow ideas of joy, beauty, value, gender, relationships, etc. I hope this photo can remind folks that sometimes it might feel like you have nothing left, but there is always something there, maybe not to celebrate but to sustain you until there is something to celebrate."

She went on to say: "Check-in on your friends. Be brave enough to talk about drug and alcohol use, suicide, self-harm, eating disorders etc. without shame or shaming but with care and hope. Fight for structural changes that allow us to expand our ideas of what is right, good, and worthy, to expand our capacity for mutual aid, community support, and care for all, to address injustices that make it impossible for some to save themselves."

Unhealthy Addiction



(Photo by Steven B. Andrews, 2020).

Steven was getting together with friends at a physically distanced outdoor space when he took this photo. In discussing this photo, he noted: "I was chilling at a friend's place and had a couple of glasses of whiskey in a wine glass. To numb depression and boredom and turn away from my own discouragement I drink, which has been having an unhealthy effect on me. I expect too much of myself and of others. I feel like I am never good enough to give what is expected. If I could use this image to educate and empower people, I would say find yourself and accept your limitations. Be strong and embrace what you can do. Pace yourself and be patient in your results. Encourage and understand others' limitations. Be patient in progression, learn to love through flaws. Do not try to change someone."

I Create Moments



I create moments.

(Photo by Steph, 2020).

Steph shared that she had been working from home since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there was minimal separation between work and home life. Steph uses incense to start and end each workday with a different smell. This ritual was essential to Steph because it was how she separated time in “the COVID world” and because she was gifted incense by her community. For Steph, this ritual was about the small moments, micro affirmations, and a thoughtful gift. Steph said: “when you string those small moments together, you can cultivate joy. . . . Learn what brings you joy. Commit to doing just a little bit more of that.”

4. Connecting With and Supporting Community

While experiencing a loss of connection and community, participant researchers found unique ways to celebrate and strengthen their ties to the larger Brantford and County of Brant communities.

Nova Vita Cheque



Nova Vita Cheque
Michael Dow
(2020).

Michael shared that he created a fundraiser for two local charities that had to cancel their annual fundraisers due to COVID-19 pandemic safety measures.

Michael's partner Steven shaved Michael's head live on Facebook and raised \$3368 from people in Canada and abroad. Michael said that the 2SLGBTQ+ community has always been supportive of our larger communities and "a community marred by adversity has gained strength by supporting each other." This fundraiser was fun and important to Michael because "sharing oneself with the community makes us feel a part of a community."

Promoting Pride in the Community



(Photo by Charlene Ayres, 2020).

Charlene, who recently came out, explained that there are not a lot of 2SLGBTQ+ events, “so we look forward to Pride . . . it’s the only time of year that we can go out and be ourselves . . . it’s not only a party, it’s about being able to be yourself.” Charlene noted that for her, even though Pride was cancelled because of COVID-19, it was still essential to find ways to support her community, connect, and celebrate during Pride month, so she got together with a group to decorate a local building in a safe and physically distanced way.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably affected our day-to-day lives, from having to wear masks, being physically distanced, to having to comply with stay-at-home policies. The pandemic and safety were important and relevant issues for participant researchers.

However, the pandemic was also political: mask wearing provided participant researchers with the ability to resist cis-heteronormativity both in public and within institutions and to create visibility, pride, and allyship. Resistance became an act of community making as participant researchers found unique ways to signal that they belong to a community through wearing Pride themed masks, that that they are not alone, and that they could be visible within the heteronormative structure of the Brantford and County of Brant communities.

Masks also enabled people to enjoy invisibility, which for some 2SLGBTQ+ people was essential for survival. However, invisibility was problematic for others. In obscuring faces, masks erase identities and detract from the efforts people have made to feel pride in how they present themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened feelings of loss and isolation, and participant researchers displayed resiliency through their coping strategies. They also found ways of connecting with the larger community through finding unique ways of celebrating Pride and supporting the larger Brantford and County of Brant communities.

Local Community Resources

The Bridge Brant

- Web: www.thebridgebrant.com
- Email: thebridgebrant@gmail.com

Social:

- [https://www.facebook.com/
TheBridgeBrantford](https://www.facebook.com/TheBridgeBrantford)

WorQshop: Building Safer Spaces

- Web: www.worqshop.ca
- Email: info@worqshop.ca

Social:

- [https://www.facebook.com/WorQshop-
Building-Safer-Spaces](https://www.facebook.com/WorQshop-Building-Safer-Spaces)
- <https://www.instagram.com/worqshopbuilding-safer-spaces/>

Brantford, Ontario LGBTQ+ Community

Facebook Group:

- [https://www.facebook.com/groups/
379313486333504](https://www.facebook.com/groups/379313486333504)

Brantford Pride

- Web: www.brantfordpride.ca
- Email: brantfordpride@gmail.com

Social:

- www.facebook.com/BtfdPride/
- [https://www.instagram.com/
brantfordpride/](https://www.instagram.com/brantfordpride/)

County of Brant Pride

Social:

- [https://www.facebook.com/groups
/ 816583548754351](https://www.facebook.com/groups/816583548754351)

Laurier Brantford Queer Sphere

- Email: queersphere@wlu.ca

Social:

- [https://www.facebook.com/Queer
Sphere](https://www.facebook.com/QueerSphere)



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Christine Wildman, the 2SLGBTQ+ Communities of Brantford and the County of Brant, and The Bridge Cover photo detail from "I Fight for Justice" by Steph

