

2SLGBTQ+ Community is a Feeling... An Experience... A Sense of Belonging



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

By

Christine Wildman, the 2SLGBTQ+
Communities of Brantford and the
County of Brant, and The Bridge



This digital book is the fourth in a series of five books.

This book examines the fourth 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)

Experiencing and Challenging Cis-heteronormativity

The previous three books in this series examined the ways that participant researchers were affected by cis-heteronormativity including

- experiences of systematic exclusion, bias and discrimination;
- how they challenged it through acts of resistance and resiliency; and
- how they identified two clear priorities for dismantling it through educating to promote inclusion and addressing discrimination and bias towards the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Representations of Community

This book will look at 2SLGBTQ+ community. Considering 2SLGBTQ+ people live in a cis-heteronormative society where they must contend with dominant structures that discriminate against and exclude them, 2SLGBTQ+ specific community is an important aspect of 2SLGBTQ+ life. Being in spaces with like-minded people helps us to feel like we belong and are accepted, cared for, loved, included and safe.

Participant researchers discussed many different aspects of what represented community for them including community as chosen family, community online and through media, communities of two, and community as caring and supportive. They talked about community as strong, resilient, diverse, loving, unique, and supportive.

1. Community as Chosen Family



(Photo by Mabe Kyle, 2020).

Family is people who will love you and support you no matter what. Family is often chosen and deliberate.

For Mabe, this photo represented how 2SLGBTQ+ people often create a chosen family and form deep, meaningful bonds despite coming from different backgrounds. Almost all Mabe's closest friends who felt like family were in the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Even though their identities within the community were different, because many 2SLGBTQ+ people feel like they have faced similar struggles they could gravitate towards each other to find comfort and support and relate more easily to one another.

Mabe noted the importance that other 2SLGBTQ+ people have had on their life and the support other 2SLGBTQ+ people have given to help them feel comfortable in their own skin and to love themselves. They discussed how intergenerational relationships within the community are important because "this is a great way to learn, grow, and support each other even more."

Family Fire



(Photo by Steven B. Andrews, 2020).

Steven shared this photo of a safe and socially distanced campfire with his chosen family and close friends. The photo represents his idea of chosen family. Steven shared that he may not be close with his family because of who he is, but his chosen family keeps him warm and feeds his fire when his biological family does not. Steven said, "family may not always be the ones you are born with; family can also be those who you relate to better. Religious beliefs and personal upbringing are a problem that exists, and while I still love my family, I cannot be myself with them. There is a need to educate through family support groups or therapy."

I Tend to Love



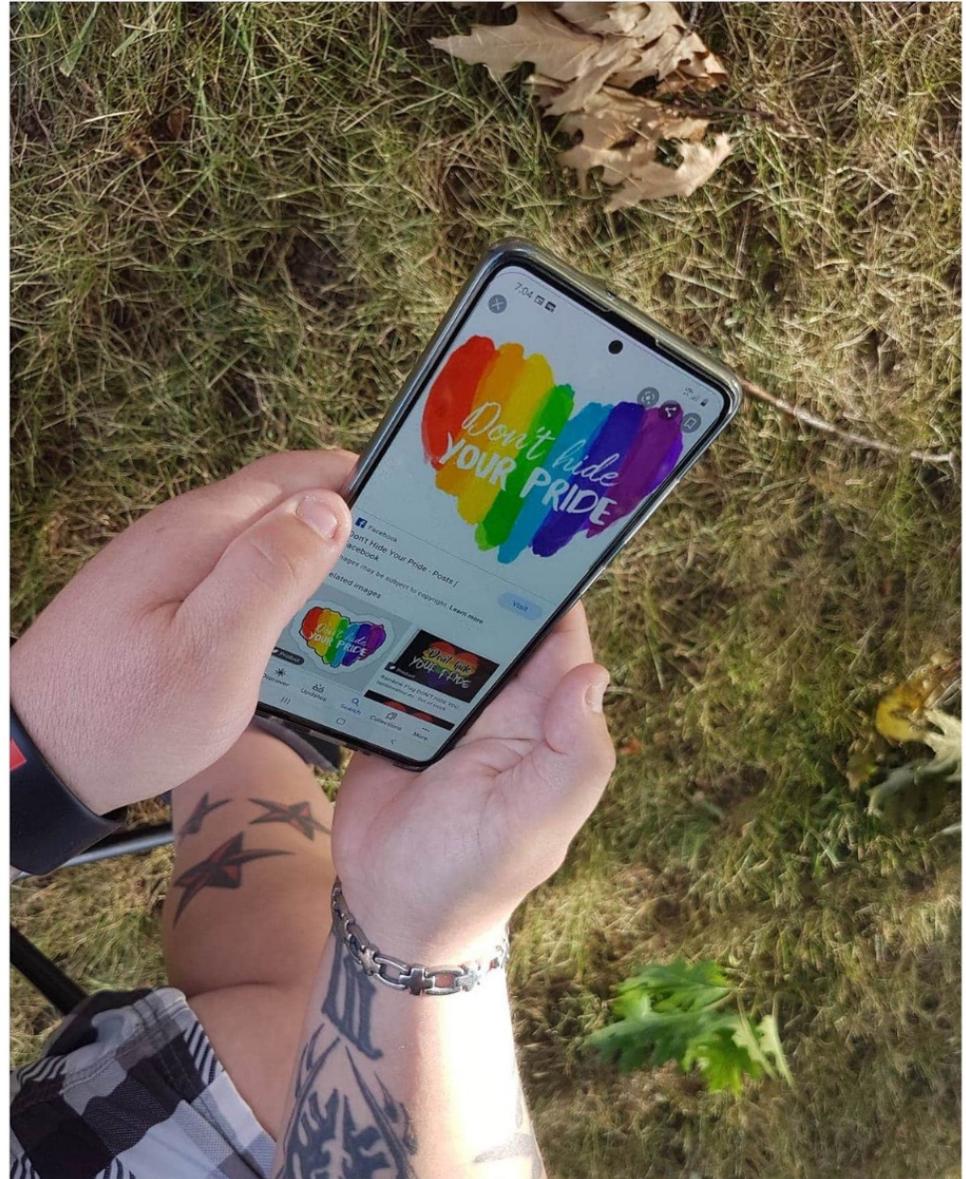
(Photo by Steph, 2020).

Steph made this fire for all her close friends who are sitting around the perimeter. She felt proud that she could make this for them. She felt loved being around those she knows accept her entirely and is grateful for them as they give so generously to the community as shelter workers, counsellors, educators, activists, etc. This space was full of love.

Chosen family is so important in the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Steph's chosen family has shown her that love can look different than she thought and more beautiful than she could imagine. Steph said, "some folks have chosen family because relationships with their bio families are difficult or non-existent. Some folks also have chosen families as they are queering ideas of the family to include different manifestations of units of care, accountability, and intimacy." Steph thinks people should "think of love like a fire. It should warm you, feed you, entertain you. It should also be work and can also hurt you. The more we see love as active – something we engage with, tend to, rather than just experience – we can start to see how love can look and feel different, how it can go, how it can be used for good or weaponized, how we can show up for love, how we can let love be love. Find your people and learn to love them."

2. Community Online and through Media

My Community

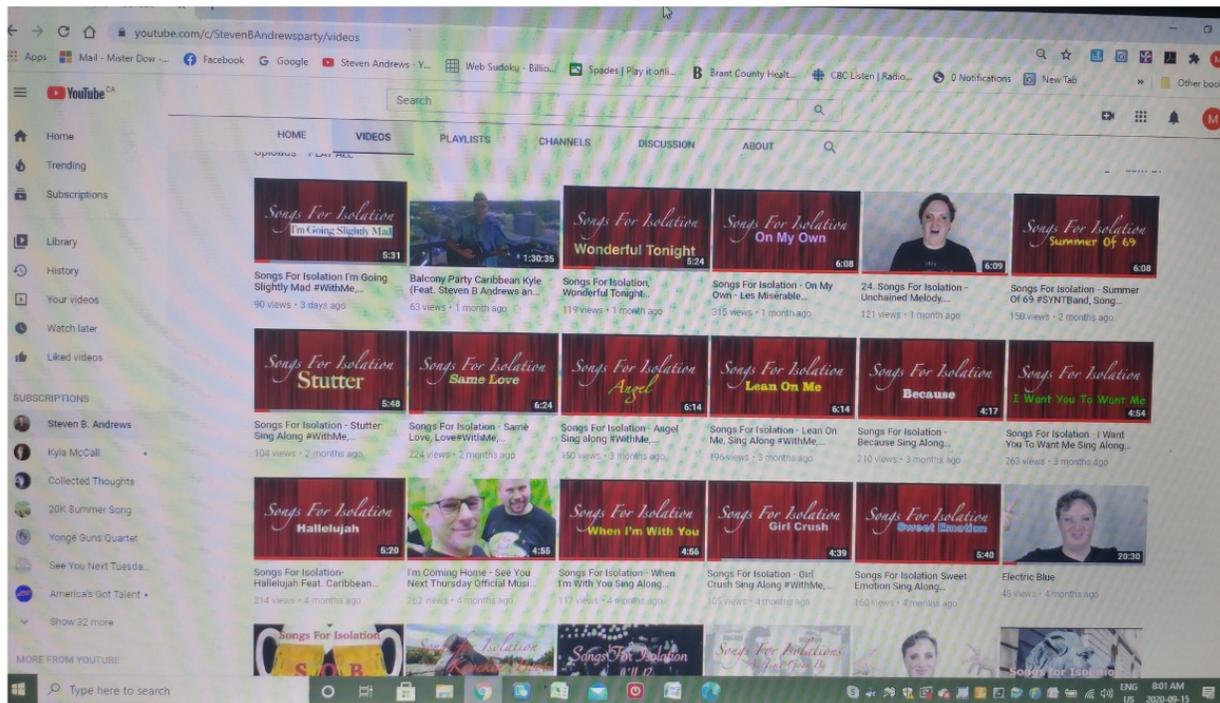


(Photo by Charlene Ayres, 2020).

Charlene submitted this photo of her browsing the internet to represent how she connects with the queer community, by going online through social media and by watching shows that contain 2SLGBTQ+ content.

Charlene said that she is shy and using social media and watching TV has helped her understand herself and understand what the 2SLGBTQ+ community could be like. It has also helped her feel less isolated and more able to be, and stay, connected with 2SLGBTQ+ community. Charlene feels that it is important to continue to have 2SLGBTQ+ content available for people noting, "it's good that there is more gay content now so people don't feel so alone."

Songs for Isolation



Steven B. Andrews kept busy entertaining isolated folks, while also isolated himself.

(Photo by Michael Dow, 2020).

Michael shared that his partner Steven developed a YouTube page on his channel titled "Songs for Isolation," where he performs songs for people in isolation while also being isolated himself. Because Steven is an entertainer, he wanted to do his part in helping people feel less isolated and alone during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a great example of creating community in physically distanced ways during the pandemic.

3. Communities of Two



Sunflower Fields Forever

(Photo by Sarah Syrett, 2020).

In a field of hope where
the sunflowers have my
back.

Sarah booked a photoshoot for her and her best friend to celebrate their friendship the way that couples celebrate their relationships. Sarah came out just before the COVID-19 pandemic and broke up with her first female partner during quarantine. The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for physical distancing meant that she had few opportunities to find community after her breakup, which she found isolating and disappointing. Both Sarah and her friend struggled with quarantine and supported each other through it, creating a community of two. Sarah said: "I felt alive and hopeful in this photo for the first time in a while, the way I feel when I feel a sense of belonging." In relation to community, Sarah commented: "it is a safety net, and it is worthy of celebration. It provides comfort and hope and magic. It's so important and can be so hard to find." Sarah talked about wanting to find community and it being very difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic considering how under normal circumstances it is difficult because "we don't walk around with badges that identify us, and we don't have gay bars or places exclusively for 2SLGBTQ+ folks to hang out and meet up." She said she wishes there were more online opportunities to create community while we are all social distancing.

She believes the photo could be used to describe the power of hope to take a person from a dark and desolate place to a bright and sunny place, and community can do that. The image shows "the power of community to turn things around for people when they feel at a loss."

Forever Lasting Love



(Photo by Charlene Ayres, 2020).

While Charlene experienced community online, she also talked about her partner being her community. This photo was taken on their wedding day and represented the love she and her partner share.

Charlene has known her partner since high school, but they did not start a relationship until a few years ago. Charlene is shy, stating, "I don't associate with many people, so she really is my person." Charlene also said: "love is love, and it was very important to me to get married so we could enjoy all those traditions together."

4. Community as Caring and Supportive...



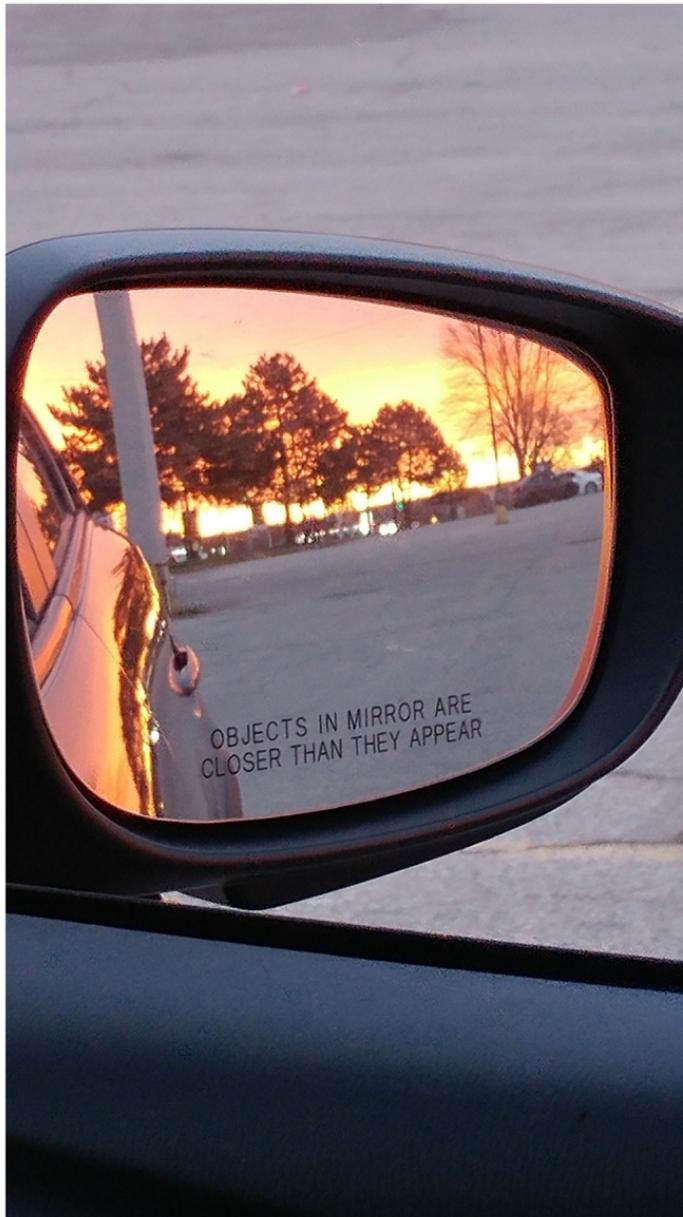
**Light in
Darkness**

(Photo by Steven B. Andrews, 2020).

Steven took this photograph from his balcony while entertaining some close friends in his circle during a party. He said: "even though we need to keep a safe distance from each other, we still shine bright with our closest friends."

Steven felt that those who are affectionate people are deprived of that physical love during COVID-19 measures, which could lead to depression. He said: "in darkness, we must stand strong and shine. The more light we shine, the more we can see and find a solution for either loneliness or depression." Steven said that it is important to keep in touch with family and loved ones.

Sideview Mirror



(Photo by Michael Dow,
2020).

Sharing Steven's sentiment, Michael submitted this photo of nature's beauty turning a plain sky and gray car into beautiful red. Michael said: "despite dreary days, positivity can brighten anything in its presence. Negativity begets negativity and the opposite is also true. Be someone's bright light. We can do our best to support one another. This sunset made the entire day worthwhile."

I Support Life

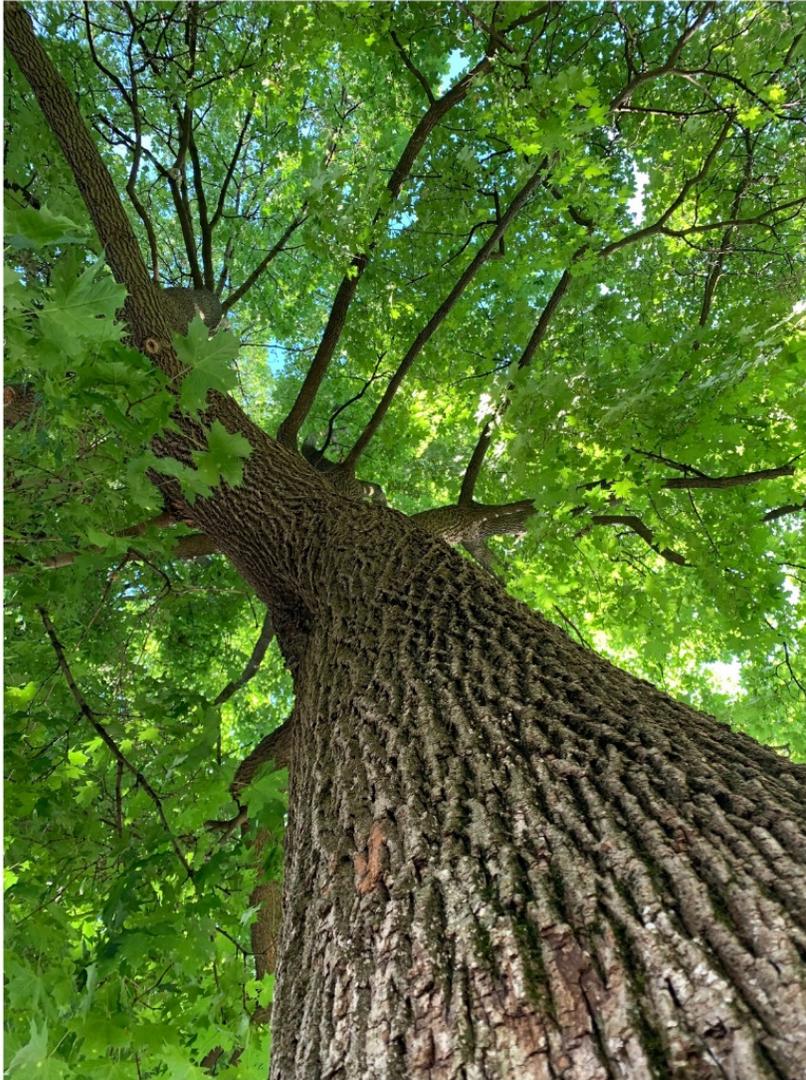
Steph used this image to represent her friends who are 2SLGBTQ+ activists, frontline workers, community organizers, social workers, educators, and researchers, etc., who save lives.

She said that her friends save lives through mutual aid; cultural creation; innovation; sharing life-sustaining resources; and through responding to risk, violence, and harm. She stated: “those in my community make this world a better place.”



(Photo by Steph, 2020).

Tree of Blithe



(Photo by Boobeck, 2020).

The tree is a unique part of the universe, and it is symbolic of community as it represents the interconnectedness of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Community, like the tree, grows and remains strong and healthy even though some parts are broken or weathered.

For Boobeck, each branch on the tree symbolizes a person's unique story of growth and experience. Boobeck stated: "the fact that the tree grows from one seed speaks volumes to the idea that the gay pride movement started with one small voice which grew into many, many more voices." Boobeck made a connection between the life process of the tree and 2SLGBTQ+ community, noting that both start as a smaller unit, then grow, experience, live, produce and eventually die. For the tree, new seeds grow, and similarly new 2SLGBTQ+ people will come along in the community and grow the movement further. Boobeck expressed that community and belonging are important to people's physical and mental health, self-esteem, and sense of self, and she stated: "I believe that knowledge is power. I think we need to start teaching our children what inclusiveness is and how important it is to every culture. Children can affect generations of people."

Larger Community Support

Rebecca drove around the city taking photos of 2SLGBTQ+ support within the greater Brantford community because it felt important to her to see support for our communities even though Pride events were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



(Photo by Rebecca Small, 2020).

Conclusion

Defining community is difficult because community is experienced in different ways for different people, and many people have multiple communities of which they are a part. Sometimes community is referred to as social groups or places where 2SLGBTQ+ people can gather in large numbers and determine the behaviours of the space. Community can be defined as a group of people sharing common goals, geographic areas, or both. Community can also be smaller numbers of people who can turn to one another in times of need either online or in person.

Findings in this project show differing experiences and ideas related to community. For some, community was having one or two people to whom they were close, and for others it was having larger groups or chosen families. But most importantly, participant researchers stressed that community was accepting, caring, and created by everyone. For participant researchers, inclusion, diversity, interconnectedness and growth were central features of 2SLGBTQ+ community.

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/worqshopb
uildingsaferspaces/](https://www.instagram.com/worqshopbuildingsaferspaces/)

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)



2SLGBTQ+ Community is a Feeling... An Experience... A Sense of Belonging

(c) 2022

Christine Wildman, the 2SLGBTQ+ Communities of
Brantford and the County of Brant, and The Bridge

