

7-2017

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Recommended Citation

Bledsoe, Kayla, "Queer People in Brazil and The United States: Bridging The Gap" (2017). *Student Submissions*. 3.
<https://mushare.marian.edu/ss/3>

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QUEER PEOPLE IN BRAZIL AND THE UNITED STATES: BRIDGING THE GAP

Kayla Bledsoe
July, 2017

The LGBT+ community is generally grouped into one big group with all the same needs by media, organizations, and people. However, LGBT+ people have different concerns and needs based on age, race, ability, and so many other identities to which they can also fall under. Additionally, gender and sexual diversity greatly differ in needs within the community. This research focuses on the history of social movements for, and politics concerning primarily cisgender women of a sexual minority (lesbian, bisexual, etc.) in America and Brazil. Traditional research methods were primarily used to discover the reality of queer people in America, such as availability to resources and mental health. However, my research of the reality of the community in Brazil is primarily based on participant observation by interviews, question and answer sessions with politicians, as well as daily conversations (or lack thereof). With this research, commonalities along with differences were found between the two countries regarding history, politics, struggles, and victories for LGBT+ women, which ultimately lead to my conclusion of proposed solutions for the betterment of women in the queer community.

KEYWORDS: LGBT+, Gender Equality, United States, Brazil

While gender equality is an essential human right, it has yet to be realized in the 21st century. Women make up half of the world's population, yet they experience unequal access to education, resources, and opportunities. In many parts of the world, women are under-represented in the governmental bodies that hold decision-making power over their lives. Across cultures and nations, women have been historically and systematically relegated as inferior to men.

Women's empowerment means nothing less than women realizing their full human potential. The United Nations recognizes that women's empowerment encompasses five components: "women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally" (United Nations, 2017, para. 4). Realizing equal rights and opportunities for women throughout the world remains a daunting imperative for this generation.

Yet, as we work for equality, we must remember that "woman" is not a single identity. "Women" cannot be restricted to straight or cisgender women. While women around the world and in America share common experiences, an accurate understanding of women's empowerment and equality must reflect the diversity of women's lives. This research focuses on the lives of women in the LGBT+ communities of the world, acknowledging their specific histories of discrimination and activism. Specifically, this research is on the history of the queer movement in America and Brazil, politics relating to queer people, and the reality of women identifying within the queer community in both countries.

The Fight for Equality in the United States

Queer people have long been silenced, marginalized and criminalized in the United States. It was not until after World War II, when queer people were targeted by Nazis, that queer people first become recognized as a minority status by organizations, with people working to protect them. When these organizations began to help raise positive awareness of the community, politicians and other groups began pushing back with harsher words, laws, and societal expectations which did not favor queer people (Richards, 2014).

The “Lavender Scare” refers to the time period in which America “saw an upsurge in vilification and legal harassment fueled by a national panic about “sexual perverts,” a phrase that was often code for homosexuality” (Richards, 2014, para. 1). This fear greatly related to the Red Scare of communism. In 1947, Representative Arthur Miller of Nebraska claimed homosexuals were threats to national security because they were more prone to blackmail because “homophobia supposedly made gays vulnerable and potential victims of blackmail, but the era’s policies of increasing homophobia theoretically made gays even more vulnerable to blackmail” (Shibusawa, 2012, p. 725). Shortly after the senator’s claims, 91 people were fired from the federal government, accused of homosexual behavior (but who could have actually been transgender, bisexual, or other identities within the queer community) along with thousands more throughout the years of the lavender scare (Johnson, 2006).

The first American organizations to fight for the rights of queer people owed their existence and growth to activist women. In 1950, Madeline Davis founded the Mattachine Society in New York which became the first sustained queer rights organization. Later in 1955 the Daughters of Bilitis was formed as a lesbian rights organization which hosted more private events in fear of social and legal persecution in San Francisco (CNN Library, 2017).

Queer organizations for women were created in some part as a response to events happening during the Lavender Scare. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance. In 1953, President Eisenhower signed the executive order that banned homosexuals from employment with the federal government (CNN Library, 2017). Additionally, these organizations were a result of queer women being left out of feminist groups and gay rights organizations. Queer women faced misogyny and discrimination from queer men and organizations; straight cisgender women, such as Betty Friedan - a leader of the National Organization of Women (NOW), worried that associating the feminist movement with lesbians would hurt the cause of women's rights. Likewise, women faced sexism and the problems of heteronormativity during the Civil Rights Movement (Newton, 2006). The misogyny of parts of the Civil Rights Movement helped to spur the feminist movements and the homo and transphobic parts of the feminist movement contributed to new understandings that expanded the concept of human freedom (Hurwitz and Verta, 2017).

Queer women became the link connecting the gay rights and feminist movements, especially queer women of color. Gay bars were separate from lesbian bars in places like Philadelphia where the bars were also segregated by race. Yet bars for African-American queers were a place for all, "collapsing the gender divisions that drove white lesbians and gay men to separate spaces" (Newton, 2006, para. 16). For the most part, though, queer women spaces were primarily separated from gay men and even some feminists, creating a community with queer women-owned bookstores, bars, record labels, and even vacation resorts. However, these spaces often faced the fear of police raids and strict roles among butch and femme white queer women caused those who were neither to be suspected as an undercover cop. The little attention given to

the violence against queer people throughout history has focused on queer men, although it certainly affected women as well (Newton, 2006).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, organizing sought to bring community among queer people, but usually separated by gender and sometimes race. The well-known protest which helped the queer movement immensely was the Stonewall Riots. It is crucial to understand these riots were not the beginning or end of the movement, but rather a turning point that created momentum. It also helped bridge the gap between the multiple identities within the queer community from drag queens to transgender women to gay men later on. Like other protests, regulars at the Stonewall Inn formed a plan to fight back against the police as they became irritated by the disruption of what was supposedly a safe space (Abelove, 2015). Drag queens especially were crucial in rallying people together to actually participate in the riots. When police raided in 1969, Stonewall patrons, both queer and allies, were ready to fight back (Segal, 2015).

The gay liberation movement is usually dated as beginning a year later with a growth in organizations, direct action and government petitions and lawsuits. It was during the liberation movement that queer women fought back against the National Organization for Women's heteronormative stances and the misogyny of gay men's movements, as well as created more spaces specifically for queer women. Queer people of faith also started to gain more acceptance and the first out gay minister was ordained by the United Church of Christ. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) was created to create support not only queer people, but also those close to them, and remains a prominent organization throughout the country today after becoming a national organization in 1982. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was founded and

provided support for all queer people, rather than only lesbian women and gay men, a few weeks after the Stonewall Riots (Cloud, 1999).

As social organizations helped bring up queer women, they started to feel more empowered to run for political office. In 1974, the first ever openly queer person in America to win an election was Kathy Kozachenko, a lesbian from Ann Arbor, on the Michigan City Council. That same year, Elaine Noble was the first openly queer person in America to win a state election and served as state legislator (CNN Library, 2017). However, it is important to put all of this into perspective. These queer women were white lesbians, who had the most privilege and recognition during the gay liberation movement and still do today. It was not until 1991 that Sherry Harris, a black openly queer woman, was elected into office but she also had privilege as a lesbian. Other ethnic/racial minorities gained an openly queer person in office even later (Asanti, 1996). Although the language used in this paper is primarily inclusive of all identities besides those who are straight or cisgender (such as queer and LGBT+), little research and history on the queer community does the same. ‘Gay’ is used to refer to the entire community often while ‘lesbian and gay’ are used to refer to all queer men and women. Despite there being little attention or credit given to bisexual, intersex, transgender, and all other queer women, there is plenty of evidence of them existing and fighting for their rights (CNN, 2017).

There have been great strides for the queer community since the gay liberation movement. In the 1990s though, there was a great amount of regression. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was put into place which meant queer people serving in the military could not be openly out. In 1996, Clinton also enacted the Defense against Marriage Act that defined marriage legally between one man and one woman, banning federal recognition of same-sex marriage (CNN Library, 2017). These policies and laws dehumanized queer people. If they could not be

out and proud or be married, what about them was necessarily human? It was also during this time that a rise of hateful speech is documented. Although ‘queer’, ‘dyke’, and ‘faggot’ had been used to demean queer people as insults or jokes among straight and cisgender people, it was during this time that these words started to diminish with the queer community. Although ‘queer’ is being reclaimed today by younger generations, it was not used for a long time because of how hurtful it was for the community (CNN Library, 2017).

In 2003, the Supreme Court finally ruled that it is unconstitutional to criminalize “homosexual behavior”. This helped gain more momentum for even better policies. “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was finally repealed in 2011 (CNN Library, 2017). However, transgender people were still not addressed in the new bill and therefore were not guaranteed the same rights as sexual minorities until 2016 (Stewart-Winter, 2015). Some states began to legalize same-sex unions and others same-sex marriage. 2015 marked a well-known historical moment in which the Supreme Court ruled it is unconstitutional to deny same-sex couples the right to marry (CNN, 2017). With such a basic human right finally afforded, it has allowed queer people to start fighting against employment, housing, and other discrimination (Stewart-Winter, 2015).

Today, there are no federal anti-discrimination laws protecting queer people. This does not only mean queer people can be denied a job or fired for their identity. It also means that queer people cannot file a workplace complaint if they are being harassed, targeted, or treated unfairly in their workplace. Former President Obama had signed an executive order claiming those who contracted federal employees could not discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity and another that those contractors had to prove their policies aligned with the former executive order. Unfortunately, President Trump recently rescinded the Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces executive order, which called for the proof of compliance with federal laws. This

will make it easier for employers to discriminate against queer people. Queer people are also not protected under the Fair Housing Act, which leaves queer people in fear of being discriminated against in the workplace, and being denied a place to live (Ford, 2017).

Although there are several laws in favor of queer people today, the reality of the queer community is not all rainbow flags and Pride parades. Religious freedom bills often allow discrimination against queer people based on religious views in private businesses, schools, and even adoption agencies. Queer people also face several other issues such as being isolated from their family as well as poor mental health and addiction problems. Because queer bars became and continue to be one of the few safe spaces for the community, queer people have higher rates of alcohol, smoking, and drug addiction as bars are more likely to have those substances around or in them. Furthermore, the stigma of being queer and being forced to “come out” because of the heteronormativity of the United States causes higher rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders along with suicide, especially for queer youth. 40% of homeless youth are queer, which is a 400% overrepresentation compared to straight and cisgender youth. Among LGB+ women, there are higher rates of obesity compared to straight women. The use of drugs and alcohol as well as overeating have been linked to experiences of discrimination, which queer women often face both as queer and as women but also even more so for immigrants, women of color, and other minority identities. Queer women also face sexualization in pornography, media, and even their personal relationships with others. Bisexual and pansexual women especially receive this around males (Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2014).

Brazilian Context

In Brazil, the LGBTTT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transvestite are the politically correct terms in the country) community seems to have many more laws in their favor

than the United States. Most laws protecting or favoring the community came before the equivalents in the United States as well. Unfortunately, LGBTTT+ people in Brazil have not always had such privileges throughout history and the reality of the situation for the people varies differently from what one may expect. The community faces a lot of stigma and fear of violence.

Homophobia is rooted in the Spanish Inquisition in Brazil. LGBTTT individuals were seen as sodomites; people believed that sodomites living in their communities could lead to, and were the cause of, disasters, plagues, or famines (Rosenburg, 2011). The Catholic religion played a large part in this stigma and still does today with the Catholic culture being large and visible in Porto Alegre. Evangelical Christianity, with its' roots from America, also contributes to harsh stigmas against the queer community today, with about 25% of Brazilians identifying with the religion (Jacobs, 2016).

During the military regime, many people suffered and were oppressed. In 1988, this regime ended and was replaced by a constitutional democracy which has lasted to today. A constitution was made by politicians and the people of Brazil, declaring certain aspects of life, such as health care, a basic necessity for a quality and fair life. This led to free health care for the entire country. Many other people or aspects were protected with this constitution. However, LGBTTT+ people were excluded "in spite of the LGBT movement's call for discrimination based on sexual orientation to be outlawed this issue" (Vianna and Carrara, 2006, 3). Most recently, a law was pushed to be passed to include LGBTTT+ people in history, sexual education, and other classes. Instead, it was stopped before it could become law because some feared it would make straight children become gay (Councilwomen, 2017). This fear is a large part of why such education needs to be included.

Additionally, patriarchy limits queer women. Before 1972, women were required to have a husband's permission for anything related to reproductive services. This left queer women without access to certain aspects of health care or with no choice but to be with a man. This patriarchy permeated throughout the LGBTTT+ movement when it began during the 1970's. Men were mostly the leaders and most visible activists. However, queer women, began to have a stronger and more visible presence in activism in the 1990s. It was during this time that queer women were not just part of gay (men's) or (straight) women's rights organization, but they began to have their own community, organizations, and even seminars. Today, there are two marked holidays to celebrate queer women (Vianna and Carrara, 2006).

During this time period, rights for the LGBTTT+ community, especially for those of a diverse sexual orientation, began to come to fruition. Organizations began to earn federal funding and grants, which was financial and emotional support, as well as recognition for the community. However, most laws protecting queer people vary by state. Many states have criminalized discrimination in housing, the work place, and protected public displays of affection among same-sex couples. Only some allow same-sex couples to adopt (Vianna and Carrara, 2006). Although it was not until 2011 that same-sex marriage became legal for all Brazilians, Rio Grande de Sul courts ruled in favor of marriage equality in 1998 and 2001 (Secretaria, 2015, para. 3). The discrimination laws were not resolved to include queer people until 2008, but even more disappointing is that the resolution to this issue and other literature protecting the community generally focuses on men, leaving queer women left behind politically and socially (Rosenburg, 2011).

Participant Observation in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande de Sul, Brazil

I arrived in Brazil on Friday June 2nd, 2017 and spent eight days there, leaving on June 9th. Most of my observations come from individuals who are queer; I specifically quote and use Isabella Ortiz (whose real name has been changed in this research to protect her privacy) most often as a way of guiding my discussion and observations. Of course, I do recognize that my study is based primarily on one interview. While Isabella's experience is that of one individual and is not generalizable to the whole queer community, it does provide an important and rich example of the kinds of issues queer individuals face. I also gained insight at the different organizations we visited and the councilwomen we met, learning both from discussing the queer community directly as well as the silences surrounding the community.

My participant observation both exceeded and failed my expectations. Although I did not want it to be the case, I was prepared to mostly write about silences surrounding the queer community. The first few days of our study affirmed my worries as queer people were rarely discussed, yet ironically, there were more queer people around me than I am ever around except in queer-specific spaces. However, I never once met a transgender person and only met one woman who knew a transgender person. It was during this time that I decided my paper should be dedicated to women of different sexual orientations rather than the entire queer community. Transgender people deserve a paper of their own with more quality and accurate information than I was able to obtain due to my limited time and access during my time in Porto Alegre. It seemed almost peculiar that, for the most part, the queer community was primarily only discussed among the Brazilians when I brought the topic up or asked specific questions. My wonder at this was primarily due to the fact that based on my research on the laws surrounding the queer community, everything seemed great. Actually, it seemed to me that queer people had

it better in Brazil than in America. However, my participant research instead informed me of the reality of being queer in Brazil. The most prominent issues I found to surround the community in Porto Alegre were safety, lack of education about queer people, and little positive visibility in daily life.

Although violence was not necessarily always on the forefront of people's minds in terms of being attacked on the street as one might imagine, the issues of safety ranged in different forms for queer people in Brazil. For some, safety did mean worrying about violence such as bullying, physical abuse, rape, or slurs. For queer women, the most common worry is rape. In Porto Alegre, the culture surrounding the queer community is hostile but also believed to be a choice or a defect in a person. Men believe, whether honestly or just as an excuse to rape women, that by raping a girl with a sexual orientation which is not straight, she can be changed or become straight again. Although this is scientifically incorrect and morally wrong, it is a legitimate belief by some in Porto Alegre. This only heightens the percent of women, and even more so queer women, who are sexually abused or raped (Ortis, 2017).

A direct result of this culture and attitude towards queer women is a feeling of uneasiness and lack of safety in many situations and places in Porto Alegre. Isabela, the woman I interviewed, found it easier to list the times and places she feels safe or comfortable enough to hold her girlfriend's hand rather than list the scenarios in which she feels unsafe. Surprisingly, she was most worried being in or around neighborhoods where her or her girlfriend's family or friends lived. 19-year-old women are scared to hold each other's hands because of the fear of someone they know seeing them, which is disappointing and disheartening (Ortis, 2017).

Although I learned the specifics of Isabela and her queer identity in our interview, I learned even more in our (almost) daily interactions with one another. Before the interview,

which took place on one of the last days of my time there, I already knew she was not out to everyone. She directly told us not to talk about her significant other or sexuality around anyone except the few people she was discussing her girlfriend with during one conversation. She did claim that she was not out to everyone yet and not everyone knew about her girlfriend because “people don’t need to know everything I do,” but also confessed to me that after coming out to her parents, they requested she slowly come out to people over time (Ortis, 2017). She has been out to her friends and parents for a year now, but she still is not out to close family friends or other family besides her sister (Ortis, 2017).

A “stereotypical lesbian cousin” in the family played a large part in how comfortable Isabela was in coming out to her family, but even more so affected her parents’ perception of the community (Ortis, 2017). This cousin was considered the black sheep of the family, but Isabela “was the opposite” (Ortis, 2017). She was the traveler, the exchange student, did volunteer work; people have high expectations of her. Somehow, being queer is not considered a high expectation, but rather would lower people’s opinions of her. Because the cousin who was already out was not well-liked by those around her and was inappropriate during a family gathering, this became Isabela and her entire family’s impression on the queer community. Isabela still harbors negative stereotypes of her own community, claiming she “doesn’t want to offend anyone,” as if being queer could somehow be offensive, which is “why I want to do it [come out] slowly” (Ortis, 2017).

Fortunately, this cousin coming out did help Isabela to feel more comfortable in her sexuality and discussing it with her parents. It actually led to a conversation not about Isabela, but about queer people after her cousin came out. This helped her dad to be more mindful later on when he wanted to know if she was seeing anyone because he asked “if I had a girlfriend or

boyfriend” (Ortis, 2017). Whether Isabela gave indications that she was similar to her cousin during the conversation with her parents, having such an inclusive question about ones’ partner is not an opportunity afforded to many queer people even after they come out.

The most difficult part of this interview was learning that it was most difficult to discuss her sexuality with her mother. Her mother works directly with a legal service for the transgender community, which helps to organize people who want to change their name and has a day to help people with the legal paperwork and the court process. The service even accompanies individuals to the courts. Her mother is a part of this. It was difficult for me to reconcile that her mother works with this progressive legal service for transgender people, yet still seems to have difficulty accepting her daughter’s identity. This duality seems to hurt Isabella. Her mother can somehow be supportive enough to seem to care about the queer community for her job, to get credit for helping people, but not actually be supportive of her own daughter. It may be that her mother is more worried for her daughter’s safety and the legal problems she may face in the future. Although less likely, it is a possibility that her mother is supportive of people with diverse gender identity, but not diverse sexual orientation. In general, the public in Porto Alegre and globally are more accepting of people who are not heterosexual than those who are not cisgender (Ortis, 2017). However, her mother’s reasoning likely is not limited to any of these or just one, but to more of a complex issue which cannot be answered simply.

Overall, there is little visibility for the queer community in Porto Alegre, in part due to safety concerns. When I asked Isabela what a normal day looked like for her, she answered with the average activities for someone at the age of 19. I wanted to know if she saw or visited queer safe spaces on a normal day, which she responded to with a “no.” I was surprised by this because she also claimed she felt connected to the LGBT+ community. I realized our ideas of community

were different, but I also realized I was similar in my thoughts when I had only been out for a year. My perception has drastically changed of what my part and connectedness to the community is now that I have been out for five years. For her, she felt “automatically part of the community because of oppression and harassment” she faced for her identity. “I need to be part of the community even though I don’t know my orientation” (Ortis, 2017).

Isabela also explained to me that although there is an organized community, again it is not as physically visible. The places she told me that she felt were safe spaces were the following: University LGBTT Zona, some friends’ houses, some professors and students at university, and gay clubs if she really needed help because “I know there will be people like me” (Ortis, 2017). I found this to be alarming; clubs and bars are meant to be places to have some fun and usually drink alcohol. They are not supposed to be where people claim they feel most safe. What about queer people who are alcoholics and seeking sobriety? Even the university safe zone poses a problem, considering not every queer person goes to college, which also leaves out professors and students as safe people. The only ideal is the friends’ homes, which is not actually ideal. Without even my bringing it up, Isabela told me her safe spaces were not enough. She envisioned a community center that was either a house or building. It would be a place where people could go if something has happened to them, whether that be violence or being kicked out of their homes and anything else. She expressed that queer people in Porto Alegre “need that support” (Ortis, 2017). A community center would be like a women’s empowerment group, Isabela explained, helping a specific group of people meet the needs they have. This is all so important because “people need to see us [queer people]” (Ortis, 2017).

Although the reality for Isabela now is nowhere near ideal or perfect, there is hope for progress in Porto Alegre. She expressed that there are people who think everything is great

because “we already have gay marriage,” that sexual diversity is just a phase, or that the Pride parade is a waste of time and space, but blamed lack of education for these misconceptions by people (Ortis, 2017). However, she also expressed that there are people who see the importance of the Pride parade, the visibility it permits, and who accept queer people. Additionally, there are programs like Canta Brazil in schools working specifically for social justice issues. We learned of many different topics they cover, which differ each year, but one topic the group covered last year with the eighth graders they worked with was the queer community. Specifically, they focused on education about the queer community such as what sexual diversity and gender identity mean and how to support people who are part of the community. The goal was to help reduce the amount and effects of bullying on queer children, which they also made sure to discuss with the children. When one of my fellow peers asked the group what their favorite part of the program was, one young girl responded that hers was “seeing how people’s perception of the LGBT community changed by the end of the program. I heard people say offensive things at the beginning and some were unaccepting, but now everyone better understands and accepts everyone” (Mose, 2017).

The End of the Rainbow-Hope

There is hope for the queer community across the globe, which my study in Brazil and the United States has affirmed. Although queer people are not granted all that they deserve, there is continuous progress being made in many avenues, which was made very apparent by my research. To make better progress for the empowerment and equality of queer women, visibility in school, media, and daily life are required along with legal protections and education.

Legal protections are a basic key in queer women’s empowerment and especially equality. Brazil has been making incredible strides and continues to do so in the political realm

for queer people. Unfortunately, women are excluded too often from this literature. Although the United States does not have as many laws and has progressed slower than Brazil, the country has relatively maintained keeping a sexist framework away from the policies protecting queer people. If the United States and Brazil's structure could merge into one cohesive way of dealing with queer policy, it would be a much more equal world.

However, without education, policy is almost worthless. A queer woman must have knowledge and understand what her rights are. If a woman faces sexual harassment in the workplace because of her sexual orientation, she may not know she has the power to stop it. Without knowing the legality of her identity, she will continue to be a victim believing that what is happening to her is just or fine or feel a sense of hopelessness that there is nothing she can do. Alternatively, a legitimate example in the United States' context is knowing how to protect oneself based on protections not afforded to queer people. Queer people deserve the right to know that there are no federal laws protecting them from being fired or hired based on sexual identity. Women especially so as they already face challenges in the workplace. Knowing there is no protection for queer people, women can be more mindful in how they disclose relationships or other personal details in order to protect themselves, if they so choose. Although policies are discussed often in the United States, I come from many advantages in that I have access to the internet, cable, and attend college. All of this gives me easy access to understand the policies surrounding myself better. However, in Brazil and the United States there is little to no conversation about queer people during schooling. It isn't until almost adulthood that queer identities are deemed "appropriate to discuss" and even then still not in school. Educating people not just about their rights, but also about the queer community in general gives queer people a

more equal opportunity to thrive and may even help straight and cisgender peers to better understand the community.

One of the most crucial aspects towards improvement for the queer community is visibility. There need to be more well-known queer artists, actors, and even activists who are well known. Mainstream media in Brazil and the United States excludes the queer community, leaving queer people to be a separate category. This somewhat helps queer people to feel more seen, but then they are still not very visible to those outside the community. Visibility is especially crucial for LGB+ women. For many of them, being queer is something erotic and incredibly sexualized in porn and mainstream media. A woman kissing a woman in both states is generally deemed as something done to please a man. Seeing women in legitimate relationships in media can help women feel more safe and comfortable in their sexuality, but seeing them in real life can be even more empowering. In Brazil, it is even harder because women do not feel safe. There is not enough visibility in daily life. Because of lack of education and visibility, it is a continuous cycle of women not being able to hold each other's hands in a market which makes for even less visibility. In the United States, legal protections are simply lacking.

It is not just one of these aspects which help queer women to feel more empowered or become equal citizens, but all of them. They all must work together within a society to make it more whole and fair. Understanding the history of the queer movements, politics surrounding the queer community, and the reality of queer people today in the United States and Brazil can help create a stronger community and improve queer people individually, as well as create better and more allies. Studying women's empowerment and equality cannot be limited to just straight and cisgender women. To do so is to demean all that queer women accomplished and continue to do

so today. Women's empowerment and equality means giving women the tools and resources to be their full, authentic selves including being queer.

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