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## Queer and Neurodivergent Identity Production within the Social Media Panopticon

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## Queer and Neurodivergent Identity Production within the Social Media Panopticon

### Cover Page Footnote

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# Queer and Neurodivergent Identity Production within the Social Media

## Panopticon

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### **Abstract**

Queerness and neurodivergence have been marginalized, policed, and oppressed throughout history, and individuals are frequently pressured to conceal or “closet” these important facets of their lived experiences. With the advent of globalization and hyperconnectivity through the internet and social media platforms, marginalized communities are able to find a larger and sometimes safer space online to learn and be validated about their identities through solidarity and visibility. However, the digitalization of community-building and identity production also allows for anyone to potentially see users’ profiles and activity. This navigation has been complicated through the access of family, peers, and employers who may not know or accept these individuals’ identities, and sometimes people are forced to filter their social media feed, personal information, and interaction with online groups in order to survive and not be outed; sometimes they create completely separate and more anonymous accounts specifically for this reason. Through an analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies based on queer and neurodivergent experiences both on and offline, and the impact of social media on these experiences, this paper will provide a deeper understanding of personalized community presences online and will be argued within the Foucaultian panoptic principles of identity self-regulation and normalization of “acceptable identities” such as heteronormativity and neurotypicality from constant surveillance and accessibility to personal information online. This

research will also explore the necessary sites of resistance where groups are able to bond and mobilize within the virtual and physical normalized world.

*Keywords:* Queer Studies, Neurodivergence, Disability Studies, Social Media Studies, Queer and Trans Identity Production, Online Communities

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## Introduction

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit *we are a threat*.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *La Prieta*

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in response to the beginning of people around the world sheltering in place from COVID-19, a Twitter user shared, “we’re like 2 weeks out from academics writing ‘queering the quarantine: towards radical forms of queer isolation’”.<sup>1</sup> With over one hundred thousand retweets, this indicates resonance by a niche audience whose members recognize the concept of “queering” something as an academic, anti-capitalist and anti-heteropatriarchal site of resistance as it is discussed in these spaces.

In research exploring the construction of a safe space and sense of belonging amongst queer African migrant men within a closed Facebook group (meaning that users have to be approved to enter the space and non-members cannot see any activity within the group), Godfried Asante (2018) states, “The creation of safe spaces remains an important area of

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<sup>1</sup> [@lilacisms]. (2020, March 13).

discussion for those whose bodies are marked as ‘other’ and subject to both state-sanctioned violence and normalized forms of exclusions” (p. 1). With both queer and neurodivergent identities inscribed upon one’s self comes many overlapping margins intersecting to inform lived experiences, such as racial/ethnic, class, and citizenship-based facets of everyday life. In 2017, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs released a report on acts of hate violence against queer people in 2016. Out of 1,036 incidents reported to 12 anti-violence organizations across the U.S., 61% of survivors were non-white, mainly Black and/or Latinx; 15% of survivors were undocumented. Additionally, 30% of survivors reported having a disability, more than half of whom reported having a mental health disability. These sobering statistics emphasize a need for safe spaces for queer and disabled people, as well as an empirical reminder that Brown and Black members of the queer and neurodivergent communities are disproportionately impacted by violence on both individual and systemic levels.

Although there is the utmost importance in recognizing qualitative and quantitative differences through the production and complicit perpetuation of the Other (Spivak, 1988), for many queer and cishet<sup>2</sup> people, the joy and power of self-identification and community is a crucial component to a deeper recognition and exploration of marginalized groups’ experiences. To emphasize the differences in queer identities and queer conceptualizations of identity production (specifically in regard to Black and Brown transfemme<sup>3</sup> identities), Shelton (2019) references the 2018 television show *Pose*, where two trans women are in conversation with each

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<sup>2</sup> Somebody who is cisgender and heterosexual.

<sup>3</sup> Wadley’s (2019) work on conceptualizing and centering Black femme identities highlights the subversion of transness within the gender binary that defies biological essentialism and instead opens discussions of gender through a more complex biopsychosocial lens, acknowledging biological, psychological, and socio-environmental factors that go into identity production, with an emphasis on social/cultural and environmental impact. Instead of thinking of femininity and masculinity in diametric opposition, femme identities provide a more fluid and expansive look into gender and identification, and that even cis individuals can locate their identities within the femme spectrum.

other, and one of them says, “How lucky are we? We create ourselves” (Murphy, Falchuk, Jacobson, Simpson, Woodall, & Marsh, 2018). *Pose* explores the unique identity and community formation that came out of the ballroom drag scene in the 1980s, and how many queer Black and Brown people created families and insulated community spaces in a safe space of their own while dealing with physical/mental health hindrances on top of sociopolitical and socioeconomic oppression, away from the generalized society that inscribes value and meaning to their bodies and identities as a means of hegemonic social control.<sup>4</sup> With this being said, it is critical to think about the ways that people with overlapping marginalized identities continue to create these spaces in an increasingly policed, globalized, and surveilled world.

This research brings both qualitative and quantitative studies regarding neurodivergent experiences and queer experiences to be discussed, recognizing the overlap that exists; it specifically looks at the intersections of queerness and neurodivergence—and, more broadly, speaking about disability culture and justice—to examine overlapping identities that are marked as the Other, considered to be in binary opposition from normative identities that have been monopolized to hold hegemonic power. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) only eliminated homosexuality as a diagnosis from the DSM-II (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in 1973, and the most recent edition of the DSM has changed the pathologized diagnosis of “gender identity disorder” for trans and intersex people to “gender dysphoria” in order to emphasize significant distress, and not individuals’ genders themselves, as the clinical

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the argument that gender and sexuality are not universal constructs, and that gender is not necessarily “located in the body” when taking into account social, cultural, and spiritual notions of identity and connection (Oyewumi, 1997; Shelton, 2019); colonization of the Americas bringing European ideas of binary gender and sexualities and pushing queer identities to the margins in a violent systemic reinforcement of white supremacy and cisheteronormativity that are still pervasive today (Smith, 2005).

hardship in question<sup>5</sup> (Drescher, 2015; Davy & Toze, 2018). The recentness of this clinical shift in understanding trans, queer, and neurodivergent identities makes it all the more important to situate these within a more holistic context, specifically regarding social control and biopolitics.

This paper will first introduce neurodivergence, disability, and queerness in conversation, and how these identities are assumed under capitalism; secondly, this will situate marginalized identities within the Foucaultian premises of biopower, biopolitics, and social control via the panopticon and its principles that translate into the virtual world; the last sections will cover virtual communities that seek to rectify the hierarchical and oppressive conditions under which queer and neurodivergent individuals are subjugated, and the changing virtual landscape due to COVID-19.

### **Neurodivergence, Disability, and the Margins**

Neurodivergence and neurodiversity are two terms that are sometimes conflated and necessitate identification. Neurodivergence, coined by Hapa and Asian-American autistic rights activist Kassiane Asasumasu, refers to the broad spectrum of neurocognitive functioning that significantly differs from what is considered “normative;” this can be expressed through either genetic or innate functioning (i.e. autism, dyslexia, ADHD), or environmental/experiential (i.e. impacted by trauma, continued practice of long-term meditation, or frequent use of psychedelic drugs) (Walker, 2014). The neurodiversity paradigm centers several principles—that neurocognitive functioning is as diverse, natural, and valuable as anything else in our bodies and identities; the conceptualizations of “healthy”, “normal”, or “correct” neurocognitive functioning

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<sup>5</sup> There are still issues with the DSM-V’s criteria of gender dysphoria that require future reconsideration, as it continues to reinforce the Western gender binary and necessitates more fluidity with how trans and intersex people view their identities and bodies; trans people do not have to experience dysphoria in order to be trans.

is a result of cultural constructs; further, the ideas of “normal” produce a hierarchical social structure of neurodivergent versus neurotypical functioning, which is expressed with other culturally marginalized identity markers (race/ethnicity, gender, class) that are deeply interconnected (Singer, 1998; Walker, 2014). Neurodiversity is a biological fact, not a perspective, theory, or an “error of nature” (Silberman, 2015).

The pathologization of neurodiversity has established neurodivergence as a considerably nebulous, disputed, and often criminalized area of physiological health. Kerschbaum (2014) writes, “Because disability is such a contested site for identity performance, it remains a challenging area in which to construct identity claims that are recognized by audiences” (p. 57). This is reinforced by Morrison (2019) discussing their process of being diagnosed by an assessor, stating, “One of the diagnostic criteria of autism is the idea that *other people find me weird*, as based on observational reports....Diagnosis gave me the impression that *everyone got to talk about me except me*” (p. 695). Language surrounding diagnosis and manifestation of neurodivergence—as well as disability overall—that constitutes them as inherent “problems” to be solved or fixed, or as something that is only validated by others’ perceived notions of “normalcy” or able-bodiedness, yields disabled/neurodivergent individuals being spoken about and treated without agency, and quite simply, reveals the lack of understanding and nuance surrounding disability.

Statistics reinforce this troubling and invalidating perception out of which systemic discrimination is perpetuated. Disabled people are almost three times as likely to live below the poverty line (Russell and Malhotra, 2019). The intersections of poverty and disability are also complicated and difficult to navigate; Goodman et al. (n.d.) writes,

While disability and poverty have an interactive effect, our social service system treats them separately. For example, disability benefits (including health coverage) are often hinged on proving one is incapable of work, but anti-poverty programs often have a work requirement. Thus, people with disabilities attempting to avoid poverty often face difficult choices. Is it preferable to leave the labor market and qualify for disability benefits or work at whatever level possible and receive wages and perhaps qualify for food stamps of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)? (p. 5)

In addition to the baseline discrimination of the overall poor and disabled populations, more than one out of five Black people live in poverty in the U.S. as of 2018, and it absolutely warrants mentioning the connections of poverty and racism in affecting mental health (Mental Health America, 2020). Access to healthcare and treatment is class-based and therefore inaccessible for those who do not have the means to afford care and diagnosis/treatment of disabilities. Black people are more frequently diagnosed with schizophrenia than white people with the same symptoms, yet less frequently diagnosed with mood disorders; compared to the general public, they are also not offered medication nor therapy at the same rates. In addition, the APA has an astoundingly small percentage of Black members (less than 2 percent); there is reasonable concern that mental health care practitioners do not have the cultural competency in order to comprehensively and responsibly treat Black patients and other patients of color (MHA, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative research such as Holley et al. (2016) has found that queer people and people of color have experienced discrimination and hindrances within mental health treatment programs, with respondents reporting not feeling heard or listened to, not being treated as complex individuals, condescension, presumed lack of intelligence, and microaggressions.

Discussions of disability and neurodivergence, along with the intersections of queerness, race, and ethnicity, are critically linked to class and capitalism. Russell and Malhotra (2019) posture disability as

“A socially created category derived from labor relations, a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society: one which creates (and then oppresses) the so-called *disabled* body as one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth. Seen in this light, disability is an aspect of the central contradiction of capitalism, and disability politics that do not accept this are, at best, fundamentally flawed strategies of reform or, worse, forms of bourgeois ideology that prevent this from being seen.”

(2019, location 188 of 5592)

With the discrimination, judgement, and policing of bodies and identities, non-able-bodied people, including neurodivergent individuals, need spaces outside of the capitalist system. Thus, they are able to access theoretically accessible spaces<sup>6</sup> such as private Facebook groups, different spheres of Twitter, Reddit, or YouTube communities, as a means of engaging within niche spaces that recognize and normalize otherwise alienated and Othered identities.

The U.S. routinely fails to sufficiently accommodate, validate, and support disabled people, as ableism and popular notions of “toxic productivity”, alongside the reductive “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” school of thought, greatly ignores individualized needs, circumstances, and the fact that the system ultimately benefits white, cisgender, able-bodied, and neurotypical identities (especially when these identities are in marriage with a high socioeconomic status). Even legislation like the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990) is subject to critique by disabled activists.

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<sup>6</sup> Excluding the costs and hindrances of accessing the internet, wi-fi, and devices to do so.

It is quite apparent that disability is looked at and regarded by its branches and not its roots. Instead of a critical look at the sociopolitical landscape and the system that has bred so much inequality, capitalist ideologues instead focus on attitudes and behaviors on an individual level. “This approach diverts attention from the mode of production and the concrete social relations that produce the disabling barriers, exclusion, and inequalities facing disabled persons” (Russell and Malhotra, 2019), which connects biopower, biopolitics, and social control.

### **Biopower and the Panopticon in a Cisheteronormative, Ableist System**

Foucault has been discussed at great length within academic studies, and many have continued to expand upon his theories of biopolitics, biopower, and the panopticon. His work, while having initially overlooked the influence of colonialism in regards to intersections of gender, race, class, and sexuality and the nuances of exertion of power (Morgensen, 2010; Koskela, 2003), serves as an important blueprint to discuss digitized spaces, and the connections between space and power, especially in regards to how marginalized communities fit into this schema.

Biopower and biopolitics are interconnected—the former is the subjugation and manipulation of bodies and populations, while biopolitics comprise the various forms of regulatory and systemic controls in order to maintain this subjugation (Foucault, 1978). The biopolitics of modern sexuality in the U.S. began with the colonization of Indigenous peoples through violence and erasure of queer Native identities (Morgensen, 2010).

Foucault's 1977 work expanding upon Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of the Panopticon<sup>7</sup> in the eighteenth century focuses on the connections of space and power. The panoptic principles of social control include the following:

- Visibility—individuals are acutely aware of the power structure in place by the physical representations and reminders; additionally, the surveilled subjects themselves are in constant visibility (in the prison design, subjects were completely saturated by a bright light from the centralized tower, so they could not see the individuals in the tower but were permanently in the light);
- Unverifiability and anonymity—the possessor(s) of power are not directly visible and cannot necessarily be attributed to individuals; rather, the symbol of power and control provides the unmistakable representation of biopolitics in action; unverifiable visibility of power enacts a heightened reflexive visibility of self to regulate and govern within spaces of surveillance;
- Internalization and normalization of control—where the surveilled subjects are so inundated by reminders and manifestations that they end up self-disciplining and conforming to avoid punishment or discipline within the context of the Panopticon;
- Absence of direct force—through these self-regulatory and “soft power” forms of control.

With the emphasis of bodies as a source of political economy via biopolitics, it is important to recognize the ways that the conceptual Panopticon is connected to identity formation—“rigid

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<sup>7</sup> The design of the Panopticon as a prison (and how it is translated into more amorphous exertions of power) presupposes a centralized tower amongst the cells where the incarcerated population would be able to see said tower; “It is polyvalent in its applications....It is a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power, which can be implemented in hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons” (Foucault, 1977, p. 243).

disciplinary practices” that include what Stern (2011) classifies as constant training and surveillance that subsequently normalize our behavior and what is deemably normative (p. 251).

Visibility politics have been dissected, critiqued, and explored through the lenses of critical race studies, disability studies, queer and feminist studies, and scholarship on social movements and organizing. It is indubitably a complex matrix of performance, resistance, and survival methodologies to traverse existence under internalized panoptic principles. The Foucaultian presuppositions of control are central to understanding the power of visibility, the reclamation of power through visibility—especially when considering the concepts of performing compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2006). Visibility of the wide range of lived experiences and how individuals present themselves can break binaries of sexuality, gender, and ability, and being able to see various shades, expressions, and breadths of existence within insulated spaces not expected to fulfill the systemic norms; that is, to reconceptualize community spaces and their expectations.

Within communities that have been excluded and alienated from their larger respective societies, being seen is culturally significant. Although digitalization and the lens of the virtual Panopticon factors into how people are being seen and through what medium/to what extent, the *choice* of reclamation of visibility and empowerment of visibility within safe(r) spaces is absolutely necessary to rethinking and reimagining virtual communities under this panoptic lens.

### **Virtual Communities and Their Impact on Identity Production**

Certainly, the exponential rise and reliance on the internet as a means of communication and self-expression has contributed to the overlap of public and private spheres of our lives (Rodat 2014). As queer people are at a disproportionately higher risk of mental health hardships than the general population, there is a heightened need for these self-made communities online

(Saha et al., 2019). Additionally, because trans people face significant barriers to home and community through socioeconomic markers such as lower employment rates, self-rated health, access to health insurance, household income, and higher rates of poverty (Carpenter et al., 2020), there is a need for spaces that acknowledge these issues, recognize the discrimination inherent in these barriers, and celebrate their existence without judgement or significant Othering.

A 2012 study showed that three social capital factors—familiarity, perceived similarity, and trust—positively related to a sense of belonging in virtual communities, which helped individuals to share their knowledge and learn from others, and that smaller and focused communities may be more effective in this (Zhao, et al., 2012). The common characteristics of online spaces for identity production are the option of anonymity, moderated spaces, equal opportunity for users to interact, shared experiences, and providing advice/knowledge/support to others.

Morrison's (2019) interest in disability studies and emergence into activist work led them to “sometimes tentatively and sometimes confidently...[begin] to explore and assert my identity as a disabled scholar on academic and public Twitter, in close-membership Facebook groups for adults with ADHD and for women with autism, in person among friends, and in and against ableism more generally” (p. 693). Thus, for some people, having the spaces to both assert and share identity-related experiences may be instrumental in helping push past the overall pressure to compartmentalize or self-invalidate their marginalized identities in order to achieve a deeper sense of self-actualization.

Participants within a study focusing on queer and religious youth in England used a Facebook group to share, debate, and exchange experiences and ideas that were generally related

to their identities and struggles, which was beyond the scope of the initial study. Facebook is a prime example of a platform where the lines between public and private lives blur.

Communication with others is “increasingly geared towards this medium,”<sup>8</sup> and as such, participants within the study discussed the confusing overlap to explore with personal information, employers, co-workers, and anyone able to view and appraise their profiles. One means of circumventing this is through the aforementioned Facebook group feature, which has varying levels of privacy. Private Facebook groups often require an initial screening of questions that may relate to a requestor’s identities, general ideologies, and respecting the group rules; moderators and admins will approve the request in order for users to view the content and see who else is in the group. Of course, this does not inherently mean that these spaces will entirely resist negative aspects of majoritarian spaces; Asante (2018) explores the negotiation, intersections, and processes of queer African migrant individuals’ identity and community: “While virtual communities that act as safe spaces...can provide the needed space for queer African migrants to reconfigure their African identity outside the scrutiny of their migrant communities and families, these virtual communities also reproduce power relations that recreates social hierarchies and exclusions” (p. 15). Race, class, citizenship, language, and access to education can impact the sense of belonging and comfortability that these types of closed groups can evoke, especially when multiply marginalized individuals are seeking refuge from the discrimination and indoctrinated ideologies of hegemonic social control from their larger communities, virtual and non-virtual.

The particular advantage of Reddit as a platform in which to share experiences and struggles lies within its anonymous and pseudonymous usership—ability to separate oneself

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<sup>8</sup> (Taylor, Falconer, & Snowden, 2014, p. 6).

from more socially integrated platforms such as Facebook and further away from panoptic social media. It is common to see posts from “throwaway” accounts within subreddits<sup>9</sup>, where the user profile is utilized as a one-time posting opportunity to maintain as much anonymity as possible.

A study conducted by Saha et al. (2019) looking at the established queer subreddit r/lgbt for the language of queer people’s stress experiences as expressed within social media categorized a lexicon of linguistic markers, which were used in subreddit posts about users’ experiences navigating their marginalized identities. The language in many users’ “minority stress” posts indicated the combinations of prejudice events, perceived stigma, and internalized LGBTphobia, with many frequent keywords being associated with sharing or disclosing to family members and friends, indicating the need for support and community elsewhere. A rainbow of subreddits exists that encompass many different aspects of queerness, neurodivergence, and other lived experiences; the continued engagement and appreciation expressed in many different users amongst these subreddits show a demand for these types of virtual spaces.

One of YouTube’s most interesting developments since its inception in 2005 is the increasingly parasocial dynamics that exist between creator and viewer, as well as between viewer and viewer. If one were to look at videos within a YouTube niche, such as the mental health or gaming communities, many content creators tend to encourage a parasocial dynamic by speaking directly to the viewers, and, thus, the community. Many creators will directly address the viewers and at some point in the video ask them to “like” the video and subscribe to their channel, and get more connected to the creator through following them on other platforms, creating a network of people with a similarly focused topic to bond over and connect with. This

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<sup>9</sup> Specific subcommunities of Reddit, such as r/lgbt, r/LGBTPolitics, r/dixiequeer (Saha et. al, 2019). Any user can join a subreddit without an initial screening, like certain private Facebook groups require.

is a network, but a “city” of people and content exists as well. In a highly transitory space such as the internet, with a seemingly infinite amount of places to visit and people to pass by and interact with, a city is most analogous in visualizing the spatialization and connectivity of niche groups, a mere highway exit along the long stretch of platforms that are teeming with life and activity through many different lenses.

Certainly, my experience navigating these virtual spaces as an insider and member of these communities have reinforced this comparison. It is a staggeringly impactful experience to be able to meet and talk to people from all over the world who can understand and relate to the experiences that come from your marginalized identities. The comfort, acceptance, and ability to be yourself, when censorship and code-switching for the sake of your own safety and comfort is constant and stifling, is a balm to these deeply embedded wounds. Along with learning about others’ experiences and gaining a deeper empathy of others and myself, residing within these virtual spaces have been able to validate my various identities that have been erased by the “passing” paradigm that exists for marginalized communities.<sup>10</sup> These niche spaces can bring visibility of ourselves in places safe to do so.

Within the concept of community lies the need for a home, especially when queer and neurodivergent people are constantly fighting to exist and be recognized. Additionally, the underrepresentation of disabled individuals within social justice groups, even within disability advocacy groups when it pertains to persons with mental and cognitive disabilities as well as queer people and people of color,<sup>11</sup> necessitates a need for a more theoretically egalitarian and home-like space where marginalized voices can be centered. Studies such as Hudson and

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the “ocular” components of racialization such as colorism; “invisible” disabilities; the concept of passing within the spectrum of queerness.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, n.d.

Romanelli (2019) have shown that community power-building, including advocacy by community leaders, would support the health and wellbeing of queer people of color. Real and virtual can overlap and are becoming our new constant, especially during the shift onto virtual community-building from COVID-19 and how we now presently engage on a micro and macro level, and how this may be the turning point in exploration of communities.

### **Looking Towards the Future**

The World Health Organization's Emergency Committee declared a global health emergency on January 30th, 2020, as a response to the emergent COVID-19, or Coronavirus, pandemic. By April, almost all U.S. states had declared stay-at-home orders (Moreland et al., 2020). We have seen a huge spike in Internet usage since the shelter-in-place was first implemented, and further, a heavier reliance on social media platforms as a means of maintaining communities during such an isolated time. The future of how we connect, communicate, and bond has been increasingly digitized, and this can be both advantageous and harmful to queer and neurodivergent communities.

For neurodivergent students, executive functioning has been impacted by the shift to online instruction and engagement.<sup>12</sup> Online Zoom classes can be exhausting and keeping track of tasks and deliverables in the midst of a pandemic can be stressful, further marginalizing, and nearly impossible. Sheltering in place can also be incredibly isolating, and individuals are in need of communities more than ever. The CDC published an article about coping with stress during a pandemic, underscoring the necessity for accessible telehealth and community spaces for affected populations. The possible lack of access to support groups, therapy, telemedicine,

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<sup>12</sup> St. Amour, M. (13 May 2020).

usual communities; individuals being in unsafe spaces due to quarantine; and disproportionate impact on Brown and Black communities have made this pandemic into a complex web of hardships beyond its public health aspects.

In addition, the concept of *home* is very difficult and complex to negotiate and explore, and some queer people's physical housing situation is unsafe, especially dependents in the U.S. In this, *home* is needed—a sense of community that, while shelter-in-place is in effect, has to be found virtually.

## **Conclusion**

Along with continued studies on community forging during the time of COVID-19, future research would benefit from deeper introspection with multiply marginalized communities utilizing social media, and barriers to access these virtual communities, as well as the myriad ways marginalized communities continue to exist, self-visibility, and reject/resist institutionalized norms within their respective societies and circles. Queer, disabled, and neurodivergent people of color, particularly Brown and Black people, are at the highest risk, yet are still marginalized within the spectrum of academic research; more qualitative studies that center their voices and lived experiences is necessary for future research; to highlight both the systemic issues they face within academia but also to provide more nuanced, three-dimensional perspectives to gain more introspection as to what institutions with systemic power and resources can do going forward to support these communities.

Regional studies would provide a deeper look into transnational and diasporic identity production online, and the difference in cultural shifts/policies and legislation in respective regions that have an impact on the formation of identity, and also when individuals begin to explore and better understand their identities. It would be beneficial to use more studies such as

Asante (2018) as a reference for diaspora studies and the continued complexities of forging senses of home, belonging, and communities online.

Further comparative research between social media platforms and their qualitative net worth to marginalized individuals' virtual navigation and search for community would be beneficial to analyze what is optimal for safe spaces and meaningful impacts of connection for queer and neurodivergent people.

In a far more digitalized world than we have seen previously, as the current global pandemic pushes us further onto virtual platforms, research identifying and learning more about the gaps is critical, such as those who do not have the access to the resources (i.e. technology, internet access) in order to maintain a sense of community and personal wellness throughout the waves of COVID-19. It will be both fascinating and necessary to examine and learn from the changes of community and identity production online for the foreseeable future, and how marginalized groups transform, resist, and engage in the face of a virtual panoptic landscape.

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