

Being Seen: Queer Appearances

by Esther Rothblum

Member of minority groups often grow up in minority communities and only learn about the majority community when they enter school. However, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) often grow up in majority communities and have to find the sexual and gender minority communities on their own. Appearance plays a large role in this process—both recognizing who looks queer and changing one's own appearance to look queer to others.

This talk will focus on a number of topics around sexual orientation, gender identity, and appearance. People sexually involved with men (that is, heterosexual women and gay men) often feel greater pressure to conform to appearance norms than people sexually involved with women (that is, heterosexual men and lesbians). Bisexual people who have been involved with men and women can reflect on these differences in their own lives, and so can transgender people who have transitioned from one gender to another. Research on dating sites has also examined how both heterosexual and non-heterosexual men and women describe their own appearance and those of the partners they seek. The terms “butch” and “femme,” and their corresponding appearance, have waxed and waned over the past decades. Meanwhile corporations study the lives of sexual and gender minorities as new “markets,” including now gender non-binary individuals.

This talk will focus on strategies for queer-identified individuals to find identity, authenticity, and a sense of belonging.