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How Disproportionately Affected LGBTQ+ Community Queerly Responds to COVID-19 in the UK

A Personal Exploration

If you know a friend or yourself from the LGBT+ community, chances are good that you know that we all like a bit of fun. Well life has already made a joke out of us (we aren't ashamed of our sexuality, it is the binary world that is uneasy about our nonconformity), why not having fun although that doesn't really justify the ubiquitous stereotypes that LGBTQ+ are eloquently humorous. Some of us are just adept at turning the hard lessons learned into something queer.

This COVID-19 crisis took a toll on us as individuals not being able to hang out with our fabulous friends, collectively for the community as a whole and even more for some members of the community. For example, a report from "OutRight Action International" documented the disproportionate suffering from the devastation of livelihoods "as a result of over-representation of LGBTQ+ people in the informal sector and broad employment discrimination", heightened family violence, closure of medical facilities and abuse of state power in some countries prone to binary gender ideologies (Bishop, 2020).

As one of the proud members, I'd like to note down here from inside the community what I have observed during this time of difficulty and grit.

Bars and perhaps nightclubs define a big part of the British social life and it is no exception for the queers. The dazzling lights of nightlife in Soho was always frequented with loads of locals and tourists alike seeking a night of heaven on earth. Until recently, and which may be due to its location close to the China Town, the street had already turned empty well before xenophobia and coronavirus racism

became a buzzword in the media.



Empty China Town Back in the Early Days of the Pandemic.

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More and more nightclubs have been closing down for the past several years. Many LGBTQ+ people rely on the friendly businesses to get through a day, meet up with their folks or to simply earn a living despite the fact that young people are reported to less and less frequent dancefloors. A £200m was estimated to be lost as a consequence according to a report from the Guardian (Booth and Halliday, 2018). It is legitimate to assume that there will be tremendous loss to those queer businesses relying on this source of income when people are opting out of going out during the

time of lockdown that started on and off from 2020 March onwards. Entertainment businesses are at the forefront of the economic fallout.

In addition, some medical services are imperative for queers to access in person like mental health counseling, HIV prescription and hormones for trans. Multiple sources have revealed that sexual minorities are living in tremendous stresses during lockdown since they are faced with the risk of family violence (Banerjee and Nair, 2020). Measures of lockdowns and prioritizing COVID-19 related medical resources makes certain members of the community more vulnerable than others.

What actions have we taken to rise up? How do we queer things up?

Queers are not easy to back down. Since the crisis prevailed, many self-help mutual aid groups and donation funds were set up. Bricks-and-mortar organizations moved to virtual sessions of therapies and socializing activities, ranging from online chatting, music performances, book/poetry reading, fitness classes to home parties. More and more volunteers come forward to do grocery shopping and deliver medications for those who are not able to go out, coordinated by established queer NGOs from what I observed from the Facebook group-*London LGBTIQ+ COVID19 Mutual Aid*. When the government decided to not officially close down the businesses earlier, the owner of G-A-Y, one of the bigtime LGBT+ clubs in the UK, lashed out at the Prime Minister that by only discouraging people from going to restaurants, clubs and so forth rather than imposing close-down, “Government isn’t liable for staff to get sick pay” (Milton, 2020). At a time like this, we gotta queer things up when the administration was not taking responsibilities besides pursuing a controversial “herd immunity” strategy.

Among the most vulnerable of the vulnerable queers, this pandemic may pose bigger risks to the asylum seekers, the elderly living in solitude and so on as their multiple

intersectional identities render themselves more susceptible to this calamity. Asylum seekers could do not only lose jobs that support their rocky livelihoods, but also money for application related fees and professional assistances from the LGBTQ+ organizations. The current asylum system usually requires proofs of gay social life and letters of recognition from established organizations to possibly acknowledge the claims as learned from Peter Tatchell Foundation[1] with which I volunteered. Also, the LGBTQ+ elderly are more likely than their counterparts to live alone, suffer from worse health conditions and experience discrimination (two in three) when accessing healthcare recourses (Pinknews, 2019). Some also live with HIV/AIDS and are in need of company (60%) when their friends died of it during the 1980s and 90s (Powys Maurice, 2020). In response, grassroots crowd-funding are springing up. For instance, a funeral fund for burying the loved ones was created for the poorer members of the community (Powys Maurice, 2020). Another initiative to open an emergency hotel for the homeless was organized by "The Outside Project" and the YHA in Central London[2]. In stark contrast to the "Darwinian" herd immunity measure taken by the government, the LGBTQ+ community from the bottom up instead showcased a solidarity-informed approach to deal with the predicaments left unattended and worsened while sticking to social distancing. Simply put, we are just talented in queer things up in times of difficulty.

"That's what people will forget, that was so much fun" said Ritchie from *It's A Sin* **[3]**, the TV series regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis in the UK back in the 80s. We have not forgotten to listen, to laugh and to dance on air even though the pandemic is threatening us all. Whilst this is particularly frightening for some of us, we queers won't mind having a bit of fun at the same time.

About the Author:

A joyful gay and a pragmatic optimist. Aspiring to bring a bit of joy to this crazy

world, Chia-Jung, Jao (Joy), graduated with MSc in Development Studies from SOAS University of London, is currently working as peer counselor in a LGBTQ+ health center in Taiwan. Writing voices of queer Asians is his ultimate life goal.

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#Witnessing Corona

Witnessing Corona is a joint blog series by the , Curare: Journal of Medical Anthropology, the Global South Studies Center Cologne, and boasblogs.

Footnotes

[1] https://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/

[2] https://www.goldengiving.com/secure/donation/the-outside-project?appealUid=7440f8a2-1f7c-4479-810a-3c48231a6574&amount=10.00/ https://lgbtiqoutside.org/

[3] "It's a Sin" Mini-TV-Series by Russell T Davies, 2021, Episode 5

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