

# Do I Belong? Power, Inclusion, Representation and Activism in an LGBTQ Spiritual Community

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## Abstract

Using a Community-Based Participatory Action Research design, this study seeks to generate awareness of the conditions under which power operates and is distributed in a queer spiritual community. In November 2015, undergraduate social work research students disseminated a survey to members of the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (MCC Toronto), Canada's largest organized LGBTQ religious community, to explore experiences of belonging, representation in leadership, and activist priorities. Respondents were asked to identify inclusion/exclusion based on race, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, age, socioeconomic status and ability. Based on 146 responses, this survey found that members who were most likely to feel excluded identified as transgender, gender queer or non-binary, intersex, pansexual and questioning. The top social justice priorities identified included LGBTQ refugee issues, transgender rights and anti-poverty activism. Greater diversity, involvement, inclusiveness, outreach and transparency in organizational leadership emerged as key things members would like to see changed. Follow-up interviews will be held to explore responses in more detail.

## Research Question

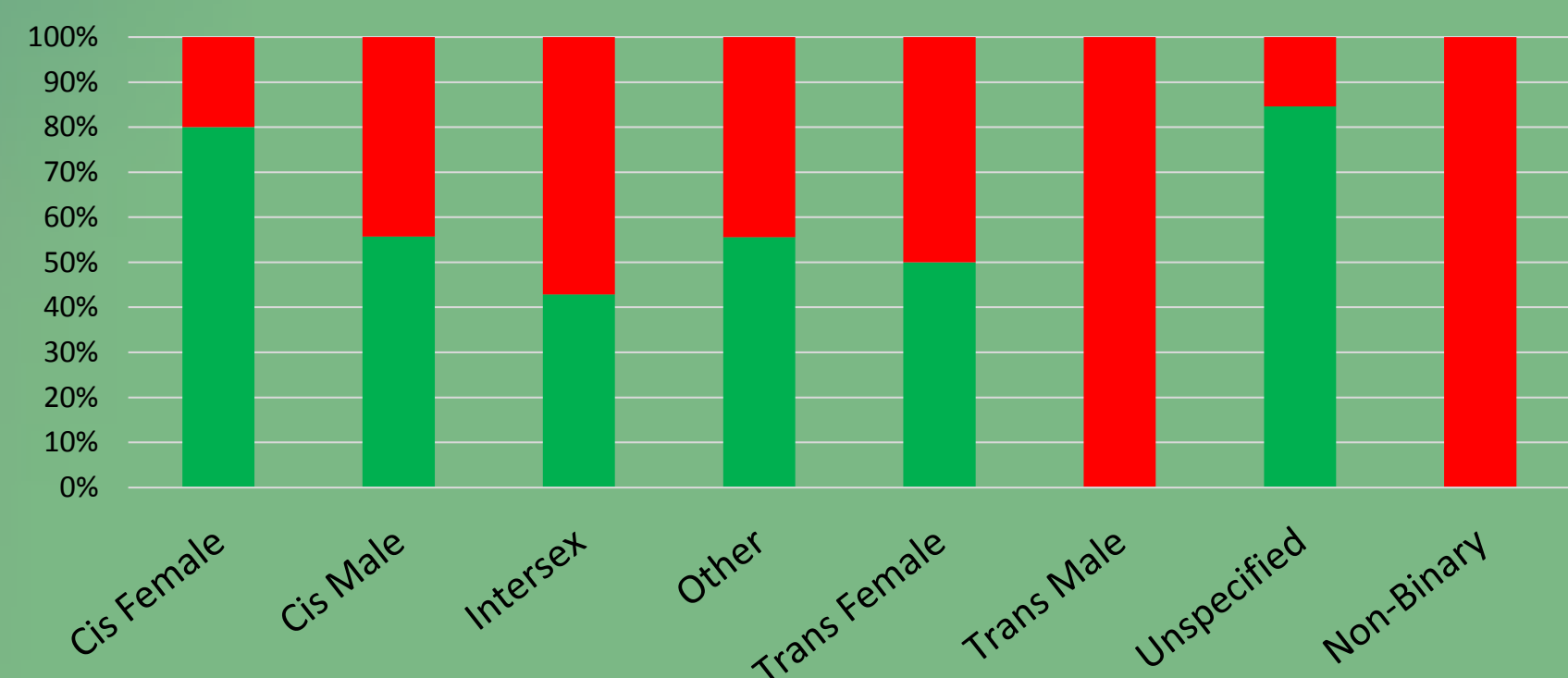
How do members of MCC Toronto perceive power imbalances affecting inclusion, representation, and social justice activities at this church?

## Method

Undergrad social work students began this study by working with MCC Toronto to determine appropriate research questions. From there, the students developed a survey which explored experiences of belonging, representation in leadership, and activist priorities connected to race, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, age, socioeconomic status and ability. Once surveys were returned, all data was manually entered into a database. Charts and graphs were created that conveyed varying key points.

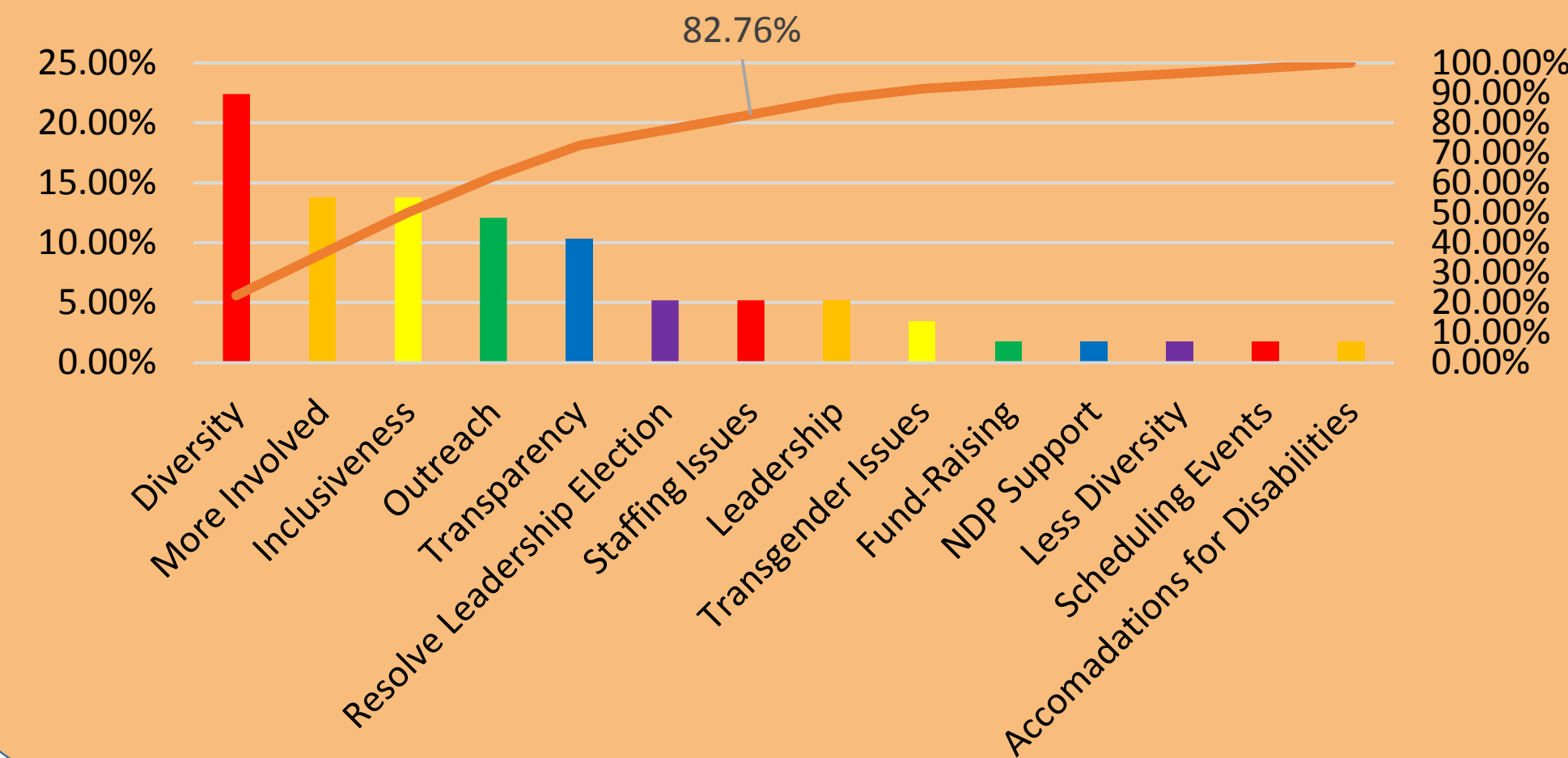
## Results

Breakdown by Gender Identity of Respondents Who Did Not Always Feel Included



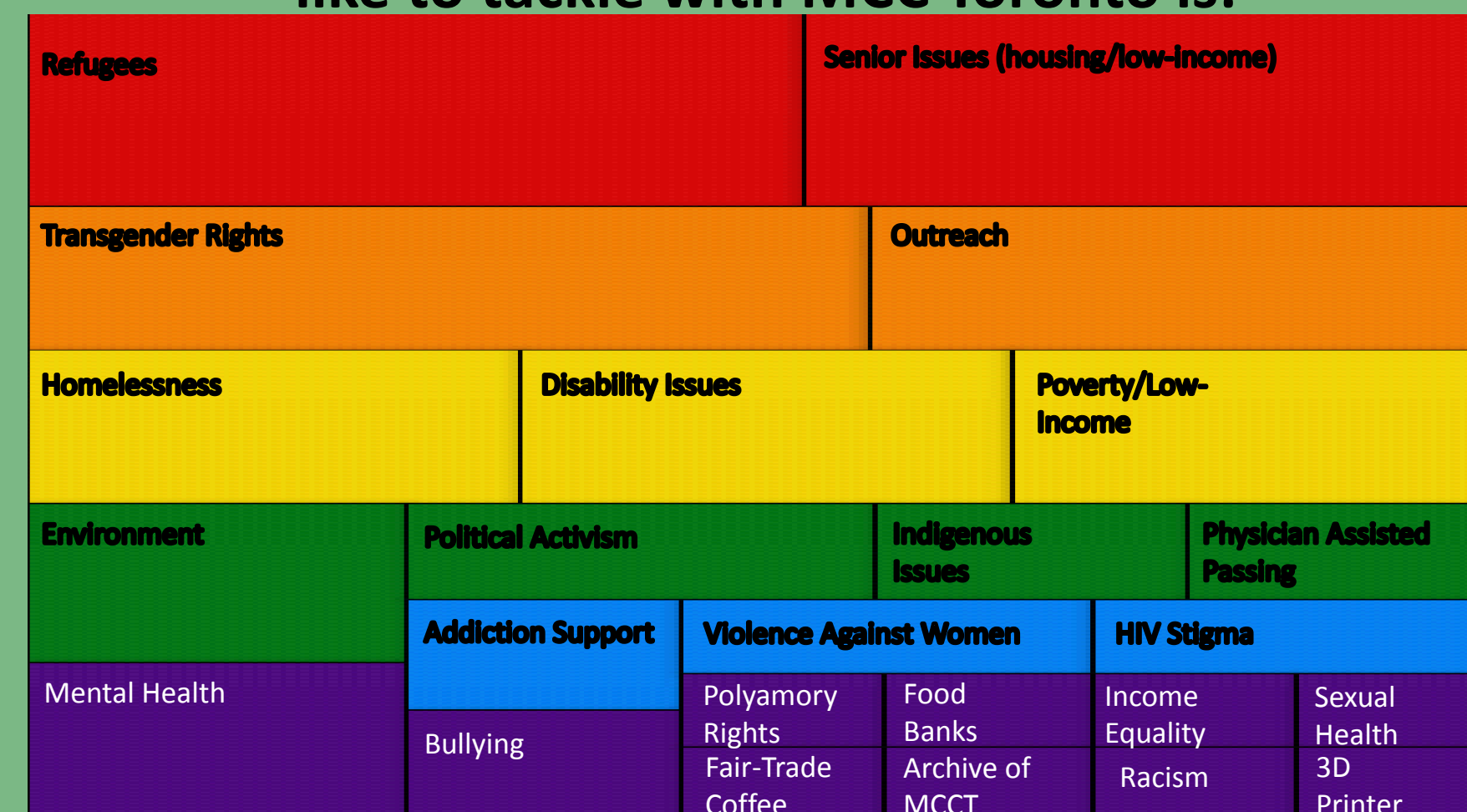
This chart demonstrates that respondents who identified as transgender, gender queer or non-binary, and intersex were most likely to feel excluded.

If I Could Change One Thing About Leadership...



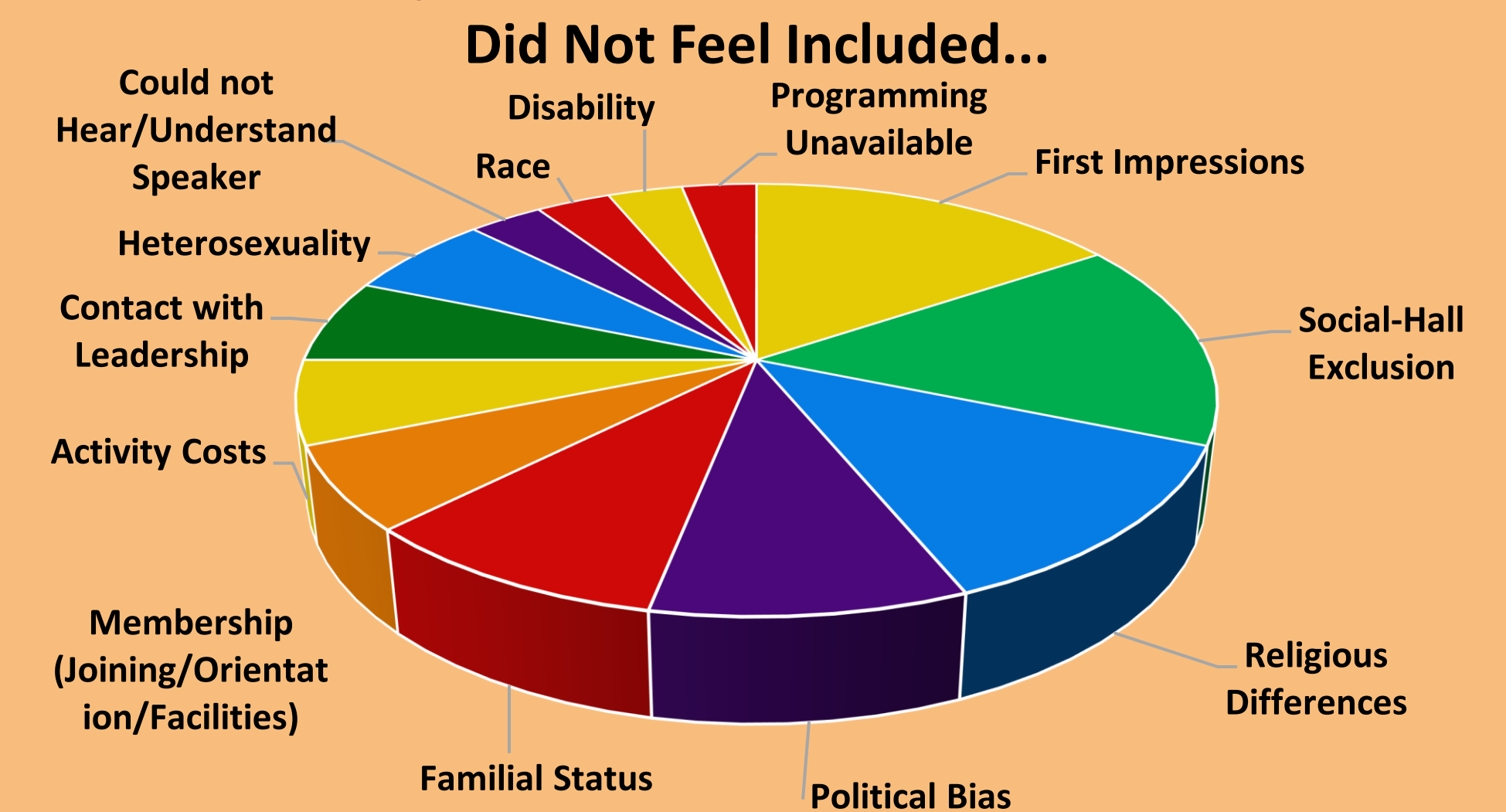
The Pareto chart indicates that issues that fall within 80% of responses are especially important to address. Issues in the bottom 20% may not be as important although some concerns may be representative of an oppressed minority such as transgender issues.

Social justice concern/project which I would like to tackle with MCC Toronto is:



A tree map is used when all responses should be weighted equally. Top social justice priorities identified included LGBTQ refugee issues, senior and anti-poverty activism, and transgender rights

An example of a time at MCC Toronto When I Did Not Feel Included...



## Discussion/Conclusion

Based on the data, we would offer the following recommendations to MCC Toronto:

- Re-emphasize Community Welcoming
  - Newcomers
  - Social Hall Cliques
- Cultural and Racial Sensitivity
  - Celebrating Diversity – Not Just Accepting It
- Transgender/Intersex/Non-binary Issues
  - Sensitivity to Pronouns
  - Community Engagement
  - Promoting Social Justice
  - Trans Representation in leadership
- Continue Championing Honesty and Inclusion

Original project in collaboration with: Sara Atherton, Maria Cascioli, Melissa Donnelly, Paul Frost, Anita Modor, and Alyssa Stoner