



## On becoming a local queer community figure, making memes and loving London, Ontario

Inspired by the lack of representation in London, Theresa Hayes created a dedicated space for an underrepresented group in the LGBTQ+ community

Cynthia Jimenez. Posted Nov. 12, 2025.

Theresa Hayes is sipping her iced almond milk latte, smiling slightly. “I really like the idea of queer people taking over certain spaces that were originally not meant for them,” she says. She gazes off to the side as if imagining what this queer invasion might look like. Something about her smile confirms what we both already know, that in a way, this invasion has already begun.

Theresa Hayes. Photo by Justice Bekke.

Theresa has been working to carve out a dedicated space for Sapphic people in the city she grew up in. Sapphic is an [umbrella term](#) which typically describes women who are attracted to women or “woman-aligned individuals.” However, the term can also be understood in a more [gender-expansive](#) way to include transgender people such as [“transmasc, femmes and non-binary folks.”](#)

The Sapphire 519 Instagram posted a [story post](#) that read “if you resonate with [Sapphic], then this account for you!!!”

As a self-proclaimed London, Ontario apologist, Theresa is loyal to this city. While dismayed with those who dismiss it — “[They] are in my home right now and telling me the carpet is the wrong colour” — Theresa also shares how she recognizes the way London has failed to be a place where Sapphic people might find community and thrive. There is an admittance that this city isn’t made for people like her, like us.

Nearly a year ago, Theresa made the [Sapphire 519](#) Instagram account. This account became the hub for her organization, dedicated to creating community amongst Sapphics in London, Ontario. The account began as a meme account and a platform for sharing queer events and resources in

London. Now, Sapphire, an online space that is marked by joy and warmth, has become so much more.

Since January, while finishing her undergraduate degree at Western University, she has hosted four events and amassed over 1,000 followers on Instagram. Justice Bekke, a queer photographer who has covered Sapphire's events, said that "I offered my services once I saw the safe and amazing sense of community [Theresa] had conjured." Others like Bekke have flocked to Theresa and Sapphire. As can be seen in the accounts introductory posts' comment section.



Screenshot taken from @Sapphire\_519 on Instagram

Now seated in a favourite local coffee shop of hers, Twins Cafe, Theresa is modest about her ideas and what the beginnings of Sapphire looked like. The cafe is mostly empty; it's an early Sunday morning. She claims it started off very much just as a "vibes thing" and jokingly does a shaka sign.

At the beginning of our meeting, Theresa tends not to meet my gaze. She seems to downplay her achievements and even admits that she has "trouble being proud of things that I do because I always underrate myself a little bit." When uncertain about an answer or pausing to think, she plays with her jewelry: a silver locket that sits at her collarbone and this thin silver ring on her right ring finger.

When asked about what prompted her to actually start Sapphire, she pointed to three things. First, she commented on a [well-known issue within the queer community](#), “I feel like [queer] spaces often are dominated by cis gay men and especially older white cis gay men.” Second, after the [boycotting](#) of The Well last year, a gay bar which faced allegations of sexual assault, London’s queer spaces were dwindling. And third, her disappointment in the few times others have tried to host Sapphic-centred events in London.

She recounted how last November the London Music Hall had a Sapphic Night which was hosted by a touring event company. “We were so excited because it was the only Sapphic specific event in London that I had ever known about.” She pauses, her face contorted trying not to laugh, “But it was just... kind of not great. It was a cash grab” she laughed, grimacing a little. “It was like they didn't even have a DJ.”

It was then she decided, “this is not what we need to settle for in terms of Sapphic-orientated events.”

Though Theresa made the definite decision to start Sapphire in January it appears that Theresa had been dreaming and musing about the possibility of Sapphire for quite some time before then.

Lucas Kettle, Theresa's friend of three years, shares that there was an initial meeting at a public library to talk about the idea that would become Sapphire. Theresa then came to them a week after to talk through her ideas. Lucas, amazed at Theresa’s work, recounted proudly that “she already had the idea by the time she wanted to bounce the idea off of me. She had so much of the logistics thought out. She had made a bunch of memes about London, Ontario localized humour but with a Sapphic perspective that you don’t really find in a lot of hegemonic spaces.”



Screenshots taken from @Sapphire\_519 on Instagram, captioned “through memes we find community. through memes we find acceptance. through memes we find our love for london ontario”

Theresa’s first and biggest event, Sapphic Invasion, she shares, was made possible through the help of [MAGICAL 519](#), a community collective which focused on hosting LGBTQ+ gatherings that were inclusive and diverse. Funded by the London Community Foundation’s [Community Vitality Grant](#), MAGICAL offered a mentorship program for those with goals to this type of work but don’t necessarily know where to start to be able to do it. Donovan Trice, the leading force behind MAGICAL, shares how Theresa “didn’t have too much experience with event coordination but had really clear ideas for what it is that she wanted to see happen.”

Theresa smiles as she recalls the process of planning the event. “I had this idea to individually paint a bunch of beads.” A pause, she twists her green and white paper straw under her pointer finger and thumb. “Like, the night before the event, I was trying to explain my idea to my one friend. And she was like, girl, you can’t do that. And I was like, are you sure?” The idea for individually painted beads was not materialized, but Sapphic Invasion was a success nonetheless.

The event held at Honey Dip Bar and Dough EV had a line out the door for most of the night. Soleil Marshall, another of Theresa’s friends who helped set up, recalls the event fondly. “Once the party actually started, it was just so wonderful because I’d heard so many people talking about it for weeks and being so excited.”

From the street, you could see the flash of lights. The bar was transformed through Theresa’s creative efforts : glow-in-the-dark stars —“the ones you see in kids’ bedrooms” — hung on the walls, silver streamers strewn throughout the room, posters of collages cut and glued together.



But beyond the decorations, the event was filled with something a little less tangible: hope. “Since attending these events, I’ve felt more comfortable in my own skin knowing there is such a big community around me,” shared Bekke.



Sapphics at Sapphic Invasion. Photo by Justice Bekke

The future of Sapphire however, is now shrouded in some uncertainty.

At the moment, Theresa is considering hiring a team to help continue her work with Sapphire. Theresa has quickly learned that event planning is not a one person job. She insists that, “I love Sapphire. I love being a person in the community, but I need this to be sustainable for me.”

Theresa also mentions that with the end of MAGICAL, she no longer has money, as given by their grant, to do large scale event planning. “Once you start having events, people kind of expect you to have more.” Her events outside of the Sapphic Invasion were intentionally held in public spaces like Gibbons Park that don’t need rental fees. Now with the cold winter settling in, free event spaces are a little more limited. She worries, “What if I can’t really give people what they want?”

It takes a couple questions and half an iced almond milk latte for Theresa to begin cracking jokes. She's a little more hesitant about personal questions, but when it comes to Sapphire, she's more than happy to share.

Theresa tends to ramble. She makes connections in her head faster than I can write them down and she can fully articulate. But amidst the tangents and circling back, one can see at its core the love she carries for Sapphire and the aim behind it. The same love and passion Lucas saw from their first conversation.

“Sapphire is absolutely Theresa's mind child, brain child. It's very close to her.”

When asked about the logistics of event planning and the responsibility she has carried out, she touches that silver ring again, and insists that “anybody could have done that. And really the thing with event planning that people don't really know is anybody could do it. Honestly, you just kind of have to decide that you're going to do it.”

What perhaps Theresa fails to realize is that very few people do make that decision, much less follow through with it to the extent that Sapphire has.

Most recently, capitalizing on an [internet trend](#), Theresa held a performative masc contest and a performative femme contest. These are the lesbian twist on the “[performative male contest](#)” where participants strut and perform as these newly emerged internet archetypes. Theresa details how viewers of the contest were sprawled on blankets in the grass. Femmes showed up with their poetry books, pink skirts and labubu's while the mascs were decked out in carabiners, tape measures and — before she could finish her thought, someone at a nearby table interjects.

“Wait, I heard performative masc contest, if you're running that, I would wanna come.” A girl at the table behind us has perked up and turned around, she is gripping the back of her seat to twist and get a better look at Theresa. The girl's eyes are wide and she smiles excitedly at the prospect of attending one of these contests.

Surprised and now giggling, Theresa explains that the events had already passed. Nevertheless, the girl gushes about how cool that is and asks how it went. Hand on her silver locket, this time twisting the chain around her finger, Theresa explains happily that it went great; people in the community had even donated prizes for the contest. The girl, with her inquiry now satisfied, turns back around to her laptop and coffee.





Contestants at the Perforative Masc Contest. Photo by Justice Bekke

Moments like these show how important the work Theresa is doing for the Sapphic community in London. These events, while seemingly silly and light-hearted, are needed to bring people together and act as spaces where Sapphics can feel safe and seen. Bekke underlines how these events also work to support queer art and culture.

But the work Theresa has been doing also has come with a set of challenges that she hadn't foreseen.

"I've been learning about navigating sort of like boundaries between me and people in the community when I've been organizing. Because I've had a lot of people pushing boundaries for me and kind of being [parasocial](#)."

When asked to elaborate on the subject, Theresa pauses. She has a slight frown, she watches the floor intently with pursed lips as if the tiled floor might offer her clarity. She explains that some people have been overstepping and acting as close friends with her. One person had even been "[trauma dumping](#)" in her DMs.

Kettler offered to shed some light on the situation. “[Theresa] is perceived in a fundamentally different way.” They also pause to think about their answer, “People paradoxically view her with distance because more people see her but quickly interpret what little they know about her to be closeness, especially because she’s building a space for community in an already marginalized space.”

Theresa doesn’t plan on publicly addressing these concerns and instead has opted not to engage with the few people who have chosen to act in this manner. Theresa worries that addressing something like this might disrupt the community she has created with Sapphire. She stares off again and brings her hands to her shoulders, hugging herself, “ I think a big part of why Sapphire has done so well is like people kind of know me in the community and I feel like I’m somebody that can be approached.”

It’s not hard to imagine how or why some of these assumingly well-intentioned but ultimately misguided people might be drawn to Theresa in this way. Warmly, in a separate interview, Trice says that “Theresa is a very uniquely vibrant person. She comes into spaces with, I think, a very clearly developed sense of self and a consistent level of authenticity.”

Towards the end of this coffee meeting, that iced almond milk latte is long gone and Theresa’s face has become slightly flushed after keenly talking about Sapphire

While there is a lot of uncertainty about the specific details and next steps for Theresa and Sapphire, one thing remains clear: At the heart of Sapphire is a girl who is willing to try and fight for a community she loves. She leaves our conversation to go study for a midterm she claimed when we first sat down was “future Theresa’s problem.”

But more importantly, she leaves our conversation hopeful and adamant about continuing Sapphire.

There is this distinct feeling I am left with that the Sapphics in London haven’t invaded as Theresa joked about earlier. Rather, they have always been here and it is through Theresa’s creation of community that they can be seen more fully. Shining a little more brightly, much like a sapphire would.