

Year 2 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

University of Minnesota

Risks and protective factors for prevention of sexual misconduct for LGBTQ+ students

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

Prevention - Identification and Reinforcing Community Values; Evaluation - Conducting qualitative research, Publicly sharing results/data from evaluation work.

Description of Work:

Background.

The University of Minnesota developed the President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct (PIPSM) in 2017. The Student Education and Engagement Committee of PIPSM was charged with developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies for a coordinated campus-wide sexual misconduct prevention plan for students. Extant research, including the 2019 Association of American Universities Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Misconduct, indicates LGBTQ+ college students face increased risk of experiencing sexual violence, yet research on evidence-based prevention strategies or research to guide prevention efforts focused on this population is virtually nonexistent. In 2020, the Student Education and Engagement Committee began a qualitative research study to better understand risk and protective factors for sexual assault among LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. The study team intentionally engaged LGBTQ+ students in developing solutions that will prevent sexual violence before it occurs.

Purpose and Goal.

The primary purpose of this research was to inform campus prevention efforts that would decrease sexual assault among LGBTQ+ undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. Utilizing a power-conscious lens, queer theory and a public health framework, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Conception of sexual violence: How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students understand sexual misconduct, and what shapes that understanding?
2. Conception of consent: What factors influence LGBTQ+ undergraduate students' understanding of consent as it relates to sexual behavior?
3. Consent practices: How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students practice consent? What factors influence LGBTQ+ undergraduate students' consent practices?
4. Power: How do LGBTQ+ undergraduate students navigate power differentials in sexual experiences?
5. Peer Networks: What influence do trusted peer groups have on LGBTQ+ undergraduate students' sexual behaviors?

Methods.

Building from the limited quantitative data available about LGBTQ+ students' experiences with sexual misconduct, this qualitative study used a community-engaged methodology to generate rich insight into the experiences of LGBTQ+ undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. A cross-disciplinary research team, most of whom identified as LGBTQ+, designed and conducted the

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assessment with significant input from LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. Utilizing an intersectional lens, the study team intentionally reached out to and selected participants who hold multiple marginalized identities (e.g. LGBTQIA+ students of color and LGBTQIA+ students with disabilities). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 LGBTQ+ undergraduate students in the Spring of 2020, and the data were thematically analyzed. In the Fall of 2020, the research team shared the findings with LGBTQ+ students and gathered additional insight about prevention strategies through a virtual focus group and an anonymous survey.

Findings.

The study provided the following nuanced and specific insights that inform campus prevention efforts:

- Early conceptions of sexual violence were significantly shaped by societal cisheteronormativity, leading to an erasure of sexual violence among LGBTQ+ people.
- All participants described receiving a lack of LGBTQ+-affirming sex education through formal sources such as K-12 schooling.
- Factors that influenced the evolution of participants' conceptions of sexual violence and consent included academic coursework, co-curricular involvement, dating and/or sexual experience, and peer groups; all 30 participants defined consent according to the affirmative standard at the time of data collection.
- All participants expressed a broad understanding of what constituted sex; this expansive definition translated to an understanding that consent is required for all sexual acts.
- Many participants discussed engaging in verbal and direct communication before and during sexual interactions. These practices varied by context and were influenced by multiple factors including degree of familiarity with one's sexual partner and awareness of one's own sexual wants, needs, and boundaries.
- In describing sexual interactions, participants reported experiencing a variety of identity-related power dynamics. Specific power dynamics were common among some participants, such as the influence of stereotypes about bisexuality and the experience of having sexual partners who were cisgender men.
- Participants' peers had a significant impact on their conceptions and their behaviors related to sex, sexual misconduct, and consent. Very often, though not universally, peers and friend groups promoted a culture of consent and demonstrated care and concern for one another's health and well-being.

Participants provided multiple insights for effective prevention. It is critical that all prevention efforts consider the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ students, and that efforts be tailored for different communities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, particularly LGBTQ Black, Indigenous, and students of color and LGBTQ+ students that live with disabilities or chronic illness. Understanding the influence of peers is of utmost importance to effective prevention. Finally, an important element of comprehensive prevention is amplifying and expanding the protective behaviors that LGBTQ+ students already practice, such as communication and boundary-setting in sexual interactions, collective care and knowledge-sharing, and activism for prevention.

For a more detailed report of the findings, visit: z.umn.edu/LGBTQstudy. A brief study snapshot can be accessed at z.umn.edu/LGBTQsnapshot.

Next Steps.

Based on these findings, existing research about campus sexual violence prevention, and feedback from

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LGBTQ+ students and campus stakeholders, the Student Education and Engagement Committee is pursuing three prevention strategies:

1. Develop LGBTQ+ sexual health education to be offered co-curricularly
2. Amplify and generate academic course offerings related to sexual violence and/or LGBTQ+ topics
3. Design a grant program to promote healthy norms among LGBTQIA+ student communities

Development, implementation, and evaluation planning for these three prevention initiatives are underway. These efforts are informed by a community-engaged approach; consultation with LGBTQ+ students, and campus partners will continue to be central to the development and implementation of these prevention initiatives. The development, implementation, and evaluation of evidence- and community-based strategies requires a sustained commitment of resources to hire and maintain skilled staff and students.

In addition to these three specific strategies, the study team recommends that existing sexual misconduct prevention initiatives be amended and/or expanded based on the findings of this assessment.

Website for further information (if applicable):

<https://president.umn.edu/initiatives/presidents-initiative-prevent-sexual-misconduct>

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