

Study Snapshot

Centering LGBTQ+ Voices in Sexual Violence Prevention

April 2021

This report is a snapshot of a study conducted to inform campus sexual violence prevention efforts for LGBTQ+ students. The study team interviewed 30 LGBTQ+ undergraduate students to understand their conceptions and experiences related to sexual consent and sexual violence. Three prevention strategies are underway based on the results.

This study was conducted in partnership by:

- Student Education & Engagement Committee of the President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct
- Boynton Health
- Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life



President's Initiative to Prevent Sexual Misconduct



Gender and Sexuality Center
for Queer and Trans Life

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About the Study

LGBTQ+ college students face increased risk of experiencing sexual violence, yet research on sexual violence prevention for this population is virtually nonexistent. With an intersectional lens and community-engaged approach, the purpose of this study was to inform sexual violence prevention efforts among LGBTQ+ students at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. In the Spring of 2020, 30 LGBTQ+ undergraduates were interviewed to better understand their conceptions of sex, sexual violence, and sexual consent, as well as their experiences navigating power dynamics within sexual interactions. The research team analyzed the interviews to develop a number of study findings, which ultimately informed strategies for preventing sexual violence among LGBTQ+ students on our campus.

Findings

Among participants in this study, we found the following themes. These findings are representative of the 30 LGBTQ+ undergraduates we interviewed and are not presented as generalizations of all LGBTQ+ undergraduates.

Early cisheteronormative messages erase LGBTQ+ sexual violence

Early conceptions of sexual violence relied on cisheteronormative notions of a male perpetrator and a female victim, leading to an erasure of sexual violence among LGBTQ+ people.

LGBTQ+ students lacked access to formal queer- and trans-centered sex education

All participants described receiving a lack of LGBTQ+-affirming sex education through formal sources such as K-12 schooling.

Sexual consent is understood to be affirmative

All 30 participants defined sexual consent as an affirmative agreement to participate in a sexual act. Many noted it should also be freely given and be an ongoing practice.

LGBTQ+ students navigate identity-related power dynamics in sexual interactions

In describing consensual and non-consensual sexual interactions, participants discussed navigating power dynamics related to race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, gender experience, sexual orientation, disability, amount of sexual expression, and sexual roles. Specific power dynamics frequently reported included stereotypes about bisexuality and the experience of having sexual partners who were cisgender men.

Expansive and pleasure-based understandings of sex promote consent for all sexual acts

All participants expressed a broad understanding of what constituted sex and many emphasized shared pleasure; expansive, pleasure-based definitions translated to an understanding that affirmative consent is required for all sexual acts.

Verbal communication before and during sex is common and contextual

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.

Peer groups influence conceptions and behaviors related to consent and sexual misconduct

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.

Prevention Recommendations and Strategies

This study provides critical insights on the needs of LGBTQ+ students in terms of sexual violence prevention. It is essential that all campus prevention efforts consider the unique experiences of LGBTQ+ students, and that efforts be tailored for different communities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Based on the findings of this study, three prevention strategies are underway. There will be ongoing opportunities for LGBTQ+ students to influence and help to implement these strategies.

Prevention Strategies

Develop LGBTQ+ sexual health education to be offered co-curricularly

This strategy focuses on developing and implementing a sex-positive, LGBTQ+ affirming sexual health curriculum. This co-curricular offering will center LGBTQ+ experiences and identities and be developed and delivered by LGBTQ+ students and staff. By engaging with this curriculum, LGBTQ+ students will develop self-awareness of their wants, needs, and boundaries; practice communication skills and boundary setting, and develop awareness of identity-related power dynamics that can impact sex and consent practices. The GSC team is leading the development in collaboration with PIPSM. There will be ongoing opportunities for LGBTQ+ students to review and provide feedback on the curriculum.

Amplify and generate academic course offerings related to sexual violence and/or LGBTQ+ topics

This strategy focuses on amplifying existing and generating new credit-bearing course offerings that address sexual violence as a power-based problem and center LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. Currently, the university offers a limited number of courses that fit this criteria; the first element of this strategy is to encourage greater numbers of students to enroll in them. The second element of this strategy is to encourage the creation of new courses and the redesign of existing courses to increase the number of classes which fit this criteria. As an educational institution, academic coursework is a central function of the university and offers great potential as a point of intervention. By incorporating these topics in courses across departments and majors, this strategy has the potential to reach a broad group of students.

Design a grant program for LGBTQ+ peer-based social norms campaigns

This strategy involves the creation of a grant program that equips and empowers LGBTQ+ students to create social norms campaigns that disrupt harmful misperceived norms and uplift healthy norms among LGBTQ+ communities at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Through this social norms grant program, LGBTQ+ student groups will develop and distribute creative campaigns that promote healthy relationships, affirmative consent practices, and respectful communication within their peer groups. This strategy aims to uplift the positive influence of peers and relies on students' intimate knowledge and lived experiences to determine and tailor the messages, tone, and mode of delivery to best reach their peers.

View the full report at z.umn.edu/LGBTQstudy

We invite feedback and suggestions related to the study. Contact Alicia Leizinger at sandb176@umn.edu. This study snapshot can be found at z.umn.edu/LGBTQsnapshot.