

Executive Summary

The UC San Diego LGBT Resource Center conducted an assessment regarding what happens when individuals participate in the life of the Center:

- Community members develop an understanding of multiple identities and how they intersect
- Individuals feel supported by the Resource Center
- An inclusive community is created

Three learning outcomes associated with connecting to the LGBT Resource Center were cited most frequently:

- Individuals are able to receive the support that they need in order to prioritize and persist through their educational/career and personal life with staff that advocate on their behalf and truly care about their future
- Community members show a desire to give back to their communities by participating in LGBT related or non-LGBT related student/employee organizations
- Those that are part of the space have had a stronger sense on how to define and describe their identities as well because of their participation with the LGBT Resource Center.

Other significant finding included:

- The groups that have more privileges within the community are aware of it
- There is a detachment between the youth and the older people that use the space
- There is a detachment between the bisexual people and the gay/lesbian people that use the space
- There is a detachment between the transgender people and cisgender people that use the space
- The social and political issues pertinent to the LGBT community have strongly influenced participants personal identities

Introduction

In the spring of 2009, the UC San Diego Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Center conducted a qualitative assessment of the community which is connected to the Center. The assessment attempted to answer one big question: what happens as a person interacts with the LGBT Resource Center? Prior to the assessment, a number of learning outcomes were developed which helped guide the assessment. These learning outcomes represented the hopes of the work of the LGBT Resource Center staff. The learning outcomes are included in Appendix A. A secondary question the assessment attempted to answer: Does the community connected to the LGBT Resource Center learn what the outcomes indicate they would?

Assessment Team

The LGBT Resource Center partnered with Dr. Amanda Roberts Human Sexuality Psychology 172 course through the Academic Internship Program. The assessment team was comprised of seven undergraduate students and the Director of the LGBT Resource Center. None of the undergraduates were familiar with the LGBT Resource Center, its programs or the community that frequented the space. At the outset of the assessment one of the team did openly identify as a member of the LGBT community, and by the end of the assessment, another team member had shared that they were a part of the community as well.

Methods

Participants

The professional staff of the LGBT Resource Center compiled a list of active participants in the life of the UC San Diego LGBT Resource Center. These participants were contacted and asked if they were interested in being a part of an assessment of the LGBT Resource Center. Those that responded were placed into a pool of possible interviewees. 28 participants were randomly selected for interviews. These included a mix of undergraduates, graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni, in relative proportion to the frequency that these members access the Center.

Data collection

An interview protocol was designed based on the proposed learning outcomes, Appendix A. An appreciative framework was also utilized to help understand experiences in the Center. Appendix B includes the questions that were asked of each participant. Each member of the undergraduate team was randomly assigned four participants to interview. Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Interviews were conducted in private spaces of the LGBT Resource Center.

Analysis

Interviewees reviewed the transcription of their interviews to ensure the accuracy of the data. Then each member of the assessment team coded the transcription for learning outcomes. These codes were then analyzed across the four interviews. This coding revealed initial themes. Each of the seven interviewers then came together to look for common themes across all the data. The full assessment team met weekly to discuss immediate reflections, experiences and analysis.

What happens as a person interacts with the LGBT Resource Center?

Identities

The data indicates that by participating in the life of the LGBT Resource Center, community members develop an understanding of multiple identities and how they intersect. When people interact in the LGBT Resource Center, there is much diversity represented. People who utilize the space become more aware of the multiple identities that a person can have. As a result, individuals discover more about themselves and their own identities. One of the interviewees captured it well, stating, "... (that) our identities are more complex than just those letters [LGBT]. We also have ethnicities, and genders, and backgrounds that make us more complicated and amazing people." Furthermore, as these identities are discovered, people gain a better understanding on how each identity can impact the other. One interviewee stated, "[S]o I think it was kind of easy coming out and coming to that aspect of my identity because I think it's been facilitated by the fact that I've been biracial and I have no problem sort of putting together identities that are supposed to be so different from each other." The various experiences of our interviewees at the LGBT Resource Center indicate they have learned that identity is an on-going process as opposed to a static presence.

Community and Support

The Resource Center has provided a sense of support for individuals as well as creating an inclusive community for everyone. The individuals that come to the Resource Center create a supportive network. Interviewees commented about how they are not only concerned about their personal relevance to the community, but also how, in a larger picture, the community is contributing to their network. Several of our interviewees demonstrated how the members of the community, both staff and students, reinforce this sense of support for each other. For example, an interviewee elaborated on how a number of the staff that frequents the Resource Center do not have kids, so these staff members see the students who come to the Resource Center as their future. With this support system, the Resource Center also establishes this sense of community, where several interviewees shared that the Center is a second home, or as one put it "a home away from home." One of the interviewees shared about their peak experience at the Center, and how they learned that although their immediate family is not present, those surrounding them at that time took care of them. This care can be characterized as providing a cocoon of familial protection. This cocoon is not familial through genetic relationship, but familial through shared identity.

What do people who frequent the Center learn?

Community members who frequent the Center learn they are able to receive the support that they need in order to prioritize and persist through their educational/career and personal life with staff that advocate on their behalf and truly care about their future. Every participant mentioned this in one form or another. They received support from the staff that helped them to stay at the institution. The support comes in a variety of ways, which includes peer support, one-to-one staff support, and cross-community center support.

The peer support comes during times of need. In one example, in the common space of the LGBT Resource Center, a student had unintentionally screamed loudly in front of a faculty member, which created a conflict. The faculty member was very upset and started to react negatively towards the student. But instead of simply witnessing the conflict, the community members in the room intervened on the situation:

“Immediately [a staff member], and my friend, and half the people in the room jumped to my rescue

and said 'nah-uh! You don't talk to people like that!' and even though I had felt I had done something wrong by screaming, they all jumped in an instant without even thinking about it and tried to help me.”

The instant support from the student’s peers and staff gave the student the feeling of unconditional support. The student said they were “my family, and they'll defend me no matter what crap happened.” Also, community members receive daily emotional support concerning everyone else’s well-being. An interviewee stated, “I think since everyone knows each other on such a personal level, people are really open to, like if they see that you’re not having a good day, or they notice that you don’t look well, they’ll come show you support, or ask you how you’re doing, they just kind of care...”

At times community members seek out help from professional staff members of the LGBT Resource Center for their needs. The data indicates there is a consistent demand for more resources from the staff. For example, when a community member wanted to set up a queer forum for another campus program, the member felt comfortable in starting a dialogue with a staff member because of the relationship they have with each other. As a result, the member quickly received help to make the forum happen. The affiliated Campus Community Centers (the Women’s Center and the Cross-Cultural Center) are part of the larger system of support that members receive. The connection shows how in an interaction or issue, the different community centers are often involved, because of the complexity that is involved.

Community members show a desire to give back to their communities by participating in LGBT related or non-LGBT related student/employee organizations. This learning outcome was prevalent throughout all of the interviews. For instance, one of the interviewees spoke about their experience at the Center, explaining:

“Being there is a way to show people that it is okay to chat with me. People need a little support from time to time. I’m a member of this community and that means something to me. I try to give a sense of comfort and connection. I’m happy to provide mentorship and support through my role counseling. Even outside of that, just kind of that unconditional positive regard for students - I like to give that back and support and acknowledge the staff and their efforts.”

This particular individual’s experience reflected several of the interviewees desire to help other LGBT-identified individuals. The mere desire to provide “unconditional positive regard for students” demonstrates the community’s natural tendency of giving back to its members. For non-LGBT organizations or individuals, one of the interviewees spoke about their work place and how their co-workers have the tendency to refer to them as a resource to answer LGBT questions, since they are affiliated with the community. They stated:

“...a lot of the times, I feel like it... is my responsibility in terms of supporting the community to turn it around back on them and say, ‘you know, they are your responsibility. You need to figure out how to deal with this situation because this could come up later in the workplace, outside UCSD. What are you going to do when you have a gay co-worker...?’”

This represents the supportive aspect of how LGBT individuals allow other people to learn and grow in their personal development and awareness. By challenging their colleague’s reliance on the token LGBT person to have all the knowledge about the LGBT community, the participant gave back to the community in concrete, sustainable ways. This demonstrates how the community that frequents the Center, through the support of the Center, outreaches and educates about the LGBT community. This story also demonstrates how other non-LGBT affiliated individuals are taught the importance of supporting the LGBT community.

Those that are part of the space have had a stronger sense on how to define and describe their identities as well because of their participation with the LGBT Resource Center. They are able to apply the knowledge they gain concerning their identities to other aspects of their education and personal lives, and to relate their own experiences with those of other members of the LGBT community. As was said in one interview, “I have this thing where if I'm in this work environment, I try to give people a first impression without knowing that I have a queer identity and then let them know because I'd rather have them judge me first and then not have to like me or not like me because I'm gay.” Even though all of the interviewees had distinct definitions to describe their identities, many of them separate their sexual orientations from their professional and educational identities. For some interviewees, their sexual identities had them taking on new roles, whether it was to educate others or serve as role models. One person described their role as, “an ambassadorship. It really does feel that way because people have to ask me questions or I feel like I have to represent my community well and that works both ways for my nationality, my age group or my sexual orientation. Yeah, I feel like I should be making a good impression for the sake of my community and not just myself because I reflect those people too.”

People who frequent the LGBT Resource Center learn a number of things. They learn they will receive the support that they need in order to prioritize and persist through their educational/career and personal life with staff that advocate on their behalf and truly care about their future. They learn a desire to give back to their communities, and participating in LGBT related or non-LGBT related student/employee organizations as a way of giving back. Those that become a part of the space learn how to define and describe their identities. Although the learning outcomes predicted some of these experiences, unforeseen results did occur as a function of participating in the life of the LGBT Resource Center.

Surprises

One surprise was that the groups that have more privileges within the community are aware of it. The community members were able to understand and identify these privileges. One of the interviewees very nicely captured the sense of privilege by saying:

“My identity is very, very privileged; and so the way that it affects [my education and work life] would be just being conscious of that; and trying not to let my privilege actually become a privilege... This space is very white and very male dominated... I am perpetuating that [whiteness and maleness by my] presence in the space. I also try to be pretty conscious of the space that I take up, and I try to encourage other people who aren't male, and who aren't white to come into this space because it's [so white and male dominant]. As much as I want to fight the fact that this space has that connotation to it, I also really, really appreciate this space, and really want to use it; so it's kind of conflicting.”

It is surprising that there is an understanding of privilege within the LGBT community itself, since one usually thinks of the privileges of the heterosexual community as the driving force for creating community at the LGBT Resource Center. In other words, because the LGBT community experiences oppression, it was surprising to hear that many were aware that their other identities (race, gender, etc.) had privileges associated with them. In addition to the white and male privilege, the cisgender community and lesbian/gay community also has a dominant presence at the Resource Center. The transgender and bisexual community does not. As one of the interviewees said, “There is a lot of biphobia and stuff that happens, so something that I find is that identifying as gay or lesbian is easier [than bisexual or transgender].” The cisgender community at the

LGBT Resource Center is much more pronounced than the transgender community, which makes it harder for the transgender community to feel like they fit. One of the interviewees expressed, “I can’t really share my feelings with people about these subjects because a lot of people are cisgendered in this space... so it’s hard for me to talk to them about what I struggle with.” There is a disconnect between the few people who are transgender and the rest of the community, so the transgender community find it hard to relate and talk about their experiences as well as gain appropriate support that they may need.

There is a detachment between the youth and the older people that use this space. The LGBT Resource Center is recognized as a great place for undergraduate students to come, hang out and make use of the resources, but it is not a friendly for many people who are older. Graduate students, staff and faculty members agreed with the statement. As one typical older participant said, “I use the Center in a different way than most other people like undergrads do.” As noted by one of the staff members at UCSD, “I don’t interact as well or comfortably in the Resource Center because now there is that staff-student difference. It is fine when we have other staff or staff meetings here, but there’s a little bit of discomfort or disconnect when I walk in here and I’m just there by myself as a staff member.” As one of the graduate students mentioned, “I have a lot of life experience and a lot of crazy stories that I could share and people could learn from here because everyone here is so very young.” However, the data indicates that with the space so populated by younger students, people who are older are not comfortable connecting and relating to them.

Several interviewees also highlighted the social and political issues that are associated with the LGBT Resource Center. For some individuals, the Resource Center acts as a place for shelter, but for others, it represents a place for activism. Moreover, many community members attach political and social issues to their identities. Thus, as one of the interviewees spoke of about pride in queerness, they stated “[B]efore I came here, before I started working, I was very anti-pride I suppose, like ‘oh no, I’m not one of those people who goes into the Resource Center and takes pride of their queerness. No, I am who I am, that’s not a huge part of my identity, but its not about pride, its just about having a place where I can relate to people.”” This highlighted several of the assessments team’s interest and surprise on how there is this stereotype of the Center being either completely an activist space, or completely a place to retreat from the harsh realities of society. Rarely is it understood to be both. As another interviewee commented, “[T]here’s another thing I appreciate is that there are people who are gung-ho and absolutely willing to fight for that cause but there are also people who don’t think the cause is particularly important or they don’t have an opinion one way or another but there’s room for both at the RC.” This type of openness and complexity, of having multiple perspectives on the Resource Center, demonstrated how others interpret what the Resource Center means to them. The label of “LGBT” Resource Center created powerful assumptions among the research team regarding those who use the space. However, the data contradicted these assumptions. The complexity in the representation of the Resource Center further coincides with people’s individual cases of their identities and how they relate to the social and political issues the Resource Center highlights.

For many community members, the social and political issues pertinent to the LGBT community have strongly influenced their personal identities. For instance, one of the interviewees emphasized the need for greater emphasis on other political issues “besides gay marriage.” Although they agreed with the need for publicity on marriage equality, specifically with Proposition 8 in California, they spoke about their connection with the LGBT Resource Center community and how their personal identity was not represented as strongly as others. They stated how, “...there are elements of my experience that have been alienating - hard to connect with people, even in light with all the interaction and stuff like that, like it’s been hard to find people in a similar situation or whom I can relate too.” For many interviewees, issues surrounding multiple identities

within the community, either affiliated with LGBT issues or other non-LGBT issues, as well as political issues, such as the military's don't ask/don't tell policy, represented several of the community members' concerns. Additionally, a lack of large social representation of multiple marginalized identities within the community has affected people's experiences. For example, queer women of color feel particularly isolated within the Center.

Moreover, the issues the LGBT Resource Center highlight and do not highlight impact participants understanding of their identity. Those who are not fully represented feel disconnect from others. Because issues related to the military's don't ask/don't tell policy aren't highlighted, individuals feel disconnected from others. Because there are not large numbers of queer women of color, people feel disconnected from others. Because people perceive the space to be activist not a safe haven, people feel disconnected from others. Because people feel the space is a shelter for those in need and not a space of activism, people feel disconnected from others. From all of these issues of activism and sheltered protection, as well as the political and social issues represented at the Resource Center, these unexpected outcomes exemplified the community's diversity and the challenges of serving the diverse community, creating community and supporting the diverse views the LGBT community present.

Reflection on the growth and learning of the assessment team

The growth of the majority of the assessment team relates specifically to the socialization of heteronormativity within society. As the team assessed community members, each member came to an awareness of the privileges of heterosexuals and heteronormativity. This realization is derived from the stereotypes held by the larger society that hold on to the rigid constructs of "appropriate" sexual and gender identities, which consistently came up throughout the assessment. As a result, the assessment gave a call to action for each team member to seek further educate themselves on their own privileges in the future.

For the most part, the team realized that most people have been raised under the constructs of heteronormativity. These constructs have been subconsciously engrained in several different ways into our psyches as we lead our daily lives. The reason these presumptions are so prominent in our society is because they have become everything (i.e. the alternative is unspoken) and go by unquestioned. Unfortunately, this also leads to hetero-mindsets where everyone is heterosexual, unless otherwise specified. When one does specify or "comes out of the closet," the person becomes stigmatized and is considered deviant by many in society. This is accentuated even more through the lack of diverse representations of gender and sexuality in mass media. Some members of the team have realized that although we do not wish to attribute to this ongoing cycle, we have been so entangled with the "norm" subconsciously and it requires such little effort that we just conform. One interviewee in the assessment insightfully captures an explanation to confirming to norms, "Most people on campus are open to the LGBT population and don't have anything against the LGBT population, but I don't know that they have any idea of how to embrace it and be part of it when they are not part of it."

As personal biases and stereotypes were addressed from our interviews, the team learned more about heteronormativity and the privileges heterosexuals have within society. Specifically from one of our researcher's self reflection exercise, the researcher stated, "I have never really had to think/worry about how others would react to my personal identity since it is the 'norm'." Likewise, the team extracted from similar experiences the understanding of how heterosexuality is not an on-going process, it just is. There is no "coming out" as heterosexual. Additionally, the team began to understand why those within the LGBT

community bring their sexual orientation to the forefront to define their identity. This heterosexual assumption about people within society demonstrated the team's understanding of how heteronormativity plays a part in their own life on a daily basis. Furthermore, this understanding of heteronormativity introduced the issues of gender, and how a powerful yet unseen cisgender privilege exists within society. For instance, the team commented about how cisgender identity is still more accepted than transgender identity in the LGB community. Once the assessment team learned what the LGBT community was comprised of, the assessment team assumed equality around gender would exist within the LGBT community. In reality, it does not.

Although several of the assessment team members experienced a sort of epiphany and greater understanding of heteronormativity and cisgender privilege, one of the team members experienced a different sort of connection/understanding. For instance, from several of the interviews, many interviewees spoke positively about the impact the LGBT Resource Center had on them. As far as their personal growth and development as a LGBT individual, they felt more at home and welcomed by the community. Therefore, for one of the team members particularly who identifies with the community, they had a stronger curiosity on how being more involved with the LGBT Resource Center would do for them. Furthermore, personally for them, they did not fully utilize the Resource Center to its fullest capacity. Thus, from hearing from other people's experiences with the Center, this particular individual became more curious regarding how the Resource Center acts as a supportive network, and what that does for those who experienced a coming out process. Moreover, this curiosity extended to the inquiring of how an individual who may experience a coming out process might either need the LGBT Resource Center as a resource, or how merely having a supportive network might forego the need for the Resource Center. Thus, this distinction of personal reflection for this particular individual highlighted a different aspect about the interviews than from the other team members.

Conclusion

Refining Learning Outcomes

Our assessment of the LGBT Resource Center has yielded many commonalities and many unique factors among the attitudes and ideas of those interviewed. Overall, many of the learning outcomes hypothesized closely resembled each other, and it would have been beneficial to refine the outcomes into a smaller list. Many of the outcomes were structured in a vague manner that made the researchers question the suitability of possible answers. Also, there were one or two outcomes that did not show up in any of the findings, including number 12 - Community members prioritize their time and understand where their personal lives and education/career may intersect at the Center since there is always social and educational interactions occurring and number 13 - Community members choose how to navigate on and off campus resources by utilizing the Center with the assistance of Center Staff. The assessment team recommends either assessing the value of these as learning outcomes, or strategizing specific programs to address these areas.

Reflecting on the Practice of Assessment

After conducting, transcribing, and analyzing 28 interviews, the researchers found that the diversity within the LGBT Resource Center similarly coincided with the diversity of the assessment team. Each person is unique. Each interview represented a different facet of the LGBT community, creating what people see as a rainbow of eclectic experiences. In reviewing our methods of research and analysis, the assessment team was able to ascertain several relevant reflections about the LGBT Resource Center and the community that it

creates. While applying this qualitative methodology, the assessment team also found different areas that we felt could improve the analysis of the LGBT Resource Center.

Areas for further study

Some of the interview questions felt redundant and the interviewee would answer most aspects of a question before it was asked. It may be beneficial to review the questions. The study focused primarily on people who frequented the Center. Those who do not frequent the Center could be interviewed to ascertain their assessment. Their responses may be important to assess the impact of the Center in the immediate or short term.

In Closing

Through this process, the workings of the LGBT Resource Center have become more clearly understood. Hopefully this document serves as a reference for this moment in time for the life of the Center and a guide for future directions of UC San Diego's LGBT Resource Center. The assessment process has certainly changed the direction of the individuals who served on the research team.

Appendix A

LGBT Resource Center Learning Outcomes

How do we define our effectiveness?

1. Community members are able to define and describe their own identities
2. Community members collect information about their multiple identities in order to define themselves, apply the knowledge they gain concerning their identities to other aspects of their education and personal lives, and to relate their own experiences with those of other members of the LGBT community
3. Community members formulate new ideas regarding the LGBT community
4. Community members are able to explain how their multiple identities intersect within themselves and with other communities
5. Community members are able to describe their own culture(s) and relate to them on different levels than they may have thought about before
6. Community members will show a desire to give back to their community(ies) by participating in LGBT related or non-LGBT related student/employee organizations
7. LGBT leaders formulate an understanding of leadership and collaboration with other campus constituents by participating in their respective organizations and also by serving on the LGBT Resource Center Advisory Board
8. Community members formulate their own sense of civic responsibility by assuming civic, political, or social responsibilities through opportunities presented by the University
9. Community members blend their understanding of themselves with how they may fit within a society where they may be from a cultural group(s) that is marginalized
10. Community members are able to explain and recognize important social and political issues in their own community as well as different cultural beliefs and behaviors in the larger world
11. Community members support one another in the Center's open, diverse and public space and learn about themselves and others in this process
12. Community members prioritize their time and understand where their personal lives and education/career may intersect at the Center since there is always social and educational interactions occurring
13. Community members choose how to navigate on and off campus resources by utilizing the Center with the assistance of Center Staff
14. Community members are able to receive the support that they need in order to prioritize and persist through their educational/career and personal life with staff that advocate on their behalf and truly care about their future

Appendix B

Interview with UC San Diego LGBT Resource Center Community Members

Assessment 2009 Interview Protocols

Introductions gratitude, and thanks for agreeing to do this

Hello, my name is _____ and I am working with Dr. Shaun Travers, Director of the LGBT Resource Center. Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. We really appreciate your willingness to share your thoughts with the assessment team. First, let me review our agenda for today

Agenda review

This whole process will take about 60-90minutes today. It includes:

1. *Review of goal of the conversation*
2. *Introduction of the process*
3. *A confidentiality and Consent Form*
4. *Audiotape recording release consent form*
5. *Questions and answers regarding the process*
6. *The actual interview*
7. *Wrap up*
8. *Thank you*

Goal of this Interview

The goal of this interview is to explore your experiences with the UC San Diego LGBT Resource Center in order to assess the Center's programs and practices.

Introduction

- *This interview is part of the research involved in the assessment of the LGBT Resource Center.*
- *Notes will be written and an audio recording will be made.*
- *If you want to share written comments as well, that would be fine. I'd be happy to receive anything on paper or over e-mail to _____. I will provide you with the questions I asked at the end of today electronically to serve as a prompt.*
- *Do you have any questions before we begin?*

Confidentiality and Consent Form (see hand out)

There are minimal risks attached to this assessment. However, because of the small number of people active in the LGBT community, complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be assured. This inability to ensure anonymity and confidentiality may limit your ability to be as open as possible. However, the assessment methodology, which includes a process of reviewing the transcript, allows you to ensure that the information accurately describes your experiences. The recordings will be erased or destroyed once this study is completed.

<Have them review forms, answer any questions, and then sign the forms. Make a copy of the forms and return copies to them for their records>

Audio recording release consent form

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this assessment project. Please indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audiorecording, your name will not be identified and your identity will be kept anonymous. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

<Have them review audio recording release consent forms, answer any questions, and then sign the forms. Make a copy of the forms and return copies to them for their records>

Introduction of the conversation questions

Over the course of the rest of our time together, I would like our conversation to travel over the terrain of your experiences with the LGBT Resource Center, your own growth and development, and the community that frequents the space. I have planned some questions, but the idea is for the stories to emerge as our interview evolves. If you need me to repeat a question, or clarify anything, I would be happy to do so.

- *Do you have any questions before we begin?*

The interview questions

- *See Interview Questions sheet, give the interview questions to the participants if they ask for it*

Closing the interview

As I mentioned, once I finish the transcription, I will return it to you to review. You can redact anything at that time. All of the interviews I complete will be analyzed and the analysis will become part of a final report. Once the final assessment is complete, it will be available to the entire community on the LGBT Resource Center's website at <http://lgbt.ucsd.edu>.

You are awesome, thank you for doing this!