

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS AND MENTORING PROGRAMS FOR LGBT+ UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender + (LGBT+) undergraduate student community are at heightened risk for a variety of health and mental health challenges due to unsupportive environments which may include home, school, and society. However, research underscores the importance of mentors, mentorship, and other social supports upon the mental health of LGBT+ youth, especially when navigating discriminatory experiences. An online survey was conducted among LGBT+ undergraduate college students within one mid-sized university located in the Midwest to assess experiences with discrimination, perceptions of mentoring, and the beneficial components of mentoring programs. 289 LGBT+ undergraduate students (65.7% cisgender female, 47.8% ages 19-20, 51.2% bisexual) responded with 71.6% of participants reporting no current LGBT+ mentor. 56.4% either agreed or strongly agreed that acceptance of the LGBT+ community could be improved at the university. Discussion centers upon the importance of mentoring programs for LGBT+ undergraduate students to provide support and create a more affirming college experience.

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender + (LGBT+) undergraduate students across the U.S. continue to face a variety of struggles stemming from homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia emanating from interactions with a variety of social, economic, and political systems (Kulick, Wernick, Woodford, et al., 2017). The impact of such discrimination, oppressive legislation, and anti-LGBT+ messages cannot be overlooked with regard to placing additional external stressors upon sexual and gender minority undergraduate students (Woodford, Han, Craig, et al., 2014). For example, in October 2019, the Trump administration argued that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not protect LGBT individuals from workplace discrimination and termination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Liptak & Peters, 2019). The resultant ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County, GA* by the Supreme Court in June 2020 affirmed that Title VII does in fact protect LGBT employees from workplace discrimination. Relatedly, in July 2020 the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced possible updates on gender based policies for homeless shelters that would allow transgender or gender diverse people to be turned away or result in accommodations based on one's assigned sex at birth rather than gender identity (Cameron, 2020).

At the school level, a report from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) indicated that 59.1% of LGBTQ students, ages 13 to 21, felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation and 42.5% because of their gender expression (Kosciw, Clark, Truong, et al., 2019). The report also found that 86.3% of LGBTQ students experienced harassment or physical assault due to their identity (Kosciw, et al., 2019). The Human Rights Campaign (2018) highlighted that only 19 states have anti bullying laws specifically for LGBTQ youth and only 13 states (plus the District of Columbia) have specific discrimination laws to protect LGBTQ youth. A 2016 study by The Center for American Progress found that

one in four LGBT people reported experiencing some form of discrimination and more than half noted some form of health care discrimination due to their sexual or gender identity (Singh & Durso, 2017).

Over the past few years, all of these challenges – whether due to oppressive federal legislation or school-based experiences – have been increasingly compounded by the intersection of national protests led by Black Lives Matter against inequality and the ongoing disproportionate police brutality against the Black community, all intersecting with the ongoing COVID-19 global health pandemic (Jean, 2020). The pandemic resulted in the sudden disruption of normal campus life in response to shelter-in-place orders and such circumstances have contributed to myriad health and mental health challenges (e.g., isolation, anxiety) for members of the LGBT+ community (Salerno et al., 2020), especially as many students no longer had access to safe spaces in residence halls and/or via social and LGBT+ identity-based supportive organizations. Therefore, it remains critical to assess the ongoing unique needs of LGBT+ undergraduate students and various factors that can impact their health and mental health, especially during such a critical developmental period as they transition into young adulthood.

This study will examine the importance of mentorship programs for LGBT+ undergraduate students, experiences of discrimination, as well as perceptions of the impact of mentoring on alleviating mental health challenges. It should be noted that when appropriate, variations of the LGBT+ acronym are used based on the study sample or research cited. In the same regard, the authors recognize that there remains a dearth of research and literature associated with understanding the unique and diverse lived experiences of transgender students as well as those comprising the "+" identities of queer, non-binary, asexual, demisexual, and omnisexual, among others. In order to understand the significant strengths and re-

silence of LGBT+ undergraduate students, it may be important to first examine contemporary LGBT+ youth and young adult identities, stressors associated with mental health, and the vital role of social supports to ameliorate discrimination experiences or a lack of acceptance by peers, family, society, etc. Relatedly, the role of mentors and mentorship programs will be discussed as vital resources and support for LGBT+ undergraduate students across the U.S.

Contemporary LGBT+ Youth and Young Adult Identities

There have been a variety of positive changes over the past twenty years affecting the lived experiences of contemporary sexual and gender diverse youth, young adults, and college age students stemming from a variety of factors such as the increased visibility of LGBT+ individuals via mainstream culture, the media, and political spheres (Fish, 2020); the landmark 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case affirming marriage equality with *Obergefell v. Hodges*; and the recent 2020 ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County, GA*, extending Title VII protections against LGBT+ workplace discrimination (Valenti, 2020). Society has ultimately become more accepting of the LGBT+ community over time due to the promotion of egalitarianism, direct and indirect contact with members of the community, and positively evolving attitudes and sentiments (Elliott-Dorans, 2020).

A glimpse of LGBT+ school age youth and young adult demographics may be evidenced in the 2019 School Climate Survey by GLSEN consisting of 16,713 students age 13-21 from across the U.S. in which a majority were White (69.2%), cisgender female (41.6%), and identify as gay or lesbian (40.4%) (Kosciw, et al., 2019). Notably, it is often during college years when young people are free to try out new identities and potentially be exposed to, or adopt, a wider range of queer identities while they live independently and away from their families for the first time (Wagaman, 2016). There-

fore, younger LGBT+ cohorts are more likely to identify as queer, non-binary, and as non-heterosexual with non-traditional identity labels across a wide array of sexual and gender diversity (DeAngelis, 2002; Goldberg, Rothblum, Russell et al., 2020).

Thankfully, a good number of LGBT+ college age students have also been exposed to a variety of safe spaces via social media platforms, affirming policies, and GSAs within their previous or existing school experiences (Cannon, Speedlin, Avera, et al., 2017; Pitcher, Camacho, Renn, et al., 2018; Worthen, 2014). Thus, there is an evolving form of empowerment and unique sense of resiliency found amongst these youth to support navigating life individually, and as a member of the broader LGBTQ+ community (Asakura, 2019) when compared to older cohorts. However, it must be noted that newer generations of LGBT+ youth and young adults still face many long-term challenges faced by others within their community for generations, such as school based discrimination and victimization (Kosciw et al., 2019), online and offline bullying (Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, et al., 2015), navigating the coming out process, homelessness (Morton, Dworsky, Matjasko, et al., 2018), as well as myriad health and mental health related issues (Wilson and Cariola, 2020).

Mental Health among LGBT+ Undergraduates

As a result of continued discriminatory and hostile environments, LGBT+ youth are still at risk of developing serious mental health problems despite societal progression towards acceptance and inclusion. Such non-affirming environments also promote homelessness and inadequate access to health care which enhances risk and reduces recovery from mental illness (Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, et al., 2011; Russell, Sinclair, Poteat, et al., 2012). LGB youth who face discrimination due to their sexuality report higher levels of depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts (Poteat, et al., 2011; Russell, et al., 2012). In fact,

LGBT+ people overall are three times more likely to contemplate suicide and five times more likely to commit suicide compared to their non-LGB counterparts (CDC, 2015). Similarly, Kirsch, Conley, and Riley (2015) found that LGB freshmen college students consistently experienced elevated difficulty transitioning to college, with significantly greater psychological distress and emotional vulnerabilities. Relatedly, a 2014 study by Woodford, et al., found that sexual minority college students were 1.57 times more likely to report a moderate to great level of anxiety symptoms and 1.73 times more likely to report a moderate to great level of depressive symptoms than their heterosexual peers. Due to such systemic stressors, it is vital to identify the unique needs of LGBT+ students so that experiences of oppression and the resultant (often negative) impact upon their health and mental health be ameliorated and addressed.

The Vital Role of Social Supports

A variety of factors can positively and negatively impact the mental health of LGBT+ youth, young adults, and undergraduate students, such as discriminatory experiences and the support and acceptance (or lack thereof) they receive from friends, family, co-workers, and others (Fish, 2020). Researchers found that positive social support significantly predicted better overall mental health for LGBT youth in several studies (McConnell, Birkett, and Mustanski, 2016; McDonald, 2018; Snapp, Watson, Russell, et al., 2015). McConnell et al. (2016) found that a significant predictor of psychological distress among 16-20 year old LGBT youth was associated with a lack of family support, resulting in a decrease of their overall psychological wellbeing. Notably, LGBT youth participants who did have other forms of social support (e.g., friends and teachers) reported the same decrease in psychological distress seen in participants who reported familial support (McConnell et al., 2016). Research by Schmidt, Miles, and Welsh (2011) underscored that perceptions

of discrimination and social support among 189 LGBT undergraduates appeared to have a meaningful relationship with indecision about career development and overall adjustment transitioning into a college environment. Researchers noted the importance of assessing the unique challenges (e.g., discrimination) faced by LGBT undergraduate students as well as underscoring their resilience (e.g., social supports) in navigating such problems (Schmidt, et al., 2011). Thus, the potential role and impact of positive and supportive family, teachers, peers, career counselors, programs, and other services accessed by LGBT+ undergraduate students should not be overlooked.

The Impact of Effective Mentors

Among certain segments of the LGBT+ community, a mentor and/or a role model can be an important factor in promoting success and resiliency in life, especially among undergraduate student populations. There are also other positive implications for having a mentor or role model. A study of LGB students found they were 2.51 times more likely to graduate if they had a mentor (Drevon, Almazan, Jacob, et al., 2016). A recent study conducted by the Trevor Project (2019), a national organization focused on addressing LGBTQ youth and suicide, identified that LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13-24 who reported having an accepting and supportive adult in their lives were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt. In addition to mentors and mentoring programs, the presence of LGBTQ clubs and school policies are often associated with a more accepting school environment, less bullying, and higher teacher and classmate support (Day, Fish, Grossman, et al., 2019). LGBTQ youth perceived they had more support from their peers and were less likely to experience homophobia when schools had LGBTQ affirming policies (Day et al., 2019). Notably, racial minority LGBTQ participant groups also reported higher levels of peer support related to LGBTQ focused clubs and policies (Day et al., 2019).

A study conducted with future LGBT health professionals found that 72% of participants reported that having an LGBT mentor was important to them for their own personal development with 59% of participants endorsing the importance of LGBT mentorship for their career development (Sanchez, Callahan, Brewster, et al., 2019). Overall, participants in the Sanchez, et al., (2019) study reported that an LGBT mentor was helpful in navigating many aspects of life whether professionally or through daily lived experiences as an LGBT individual. Therefore, along with affirming policies and supportive institutions, undergraduate mentoring programs might likely enhance support and be quite beneficial for college age LGBT+ students during a vital stage of their development.

The Role of Mentoring Programs

One possible way to assist LGBT+ individuals that combines the benefits of social acceptance and support while attending to their mental health and overall well-being, may be through a formalized mentorship program. One study of non-parental mentors found that collegiate mentees were more likely to report greater levels of support and decreased mental distress when having a mentor (Hurd, Albright, Wittrup, et al., 2018). Similarly, Hagler (2018) argued that mentors can assist mentees with understanding the environment around them and how to best navigate it as an underrepresented person. McLauren, Schurmann, and Jenkins (2015) found that students reporting increased connectedness to their youth mentoring group felt more connected to their school, teachers, and peers alike. Greater peer and school connectedness was related to fewer depressive symptoms, with the youth mentoring group improving participants' understanding of identity, relationships, and overall confidence (McLauren et al., 2015). While none of the previous studies specifically examined the impact of mentorship upon LGBT+ students, mentoring was found to play a critical role in the

positive development of sexual identity in a study by Ross (2005). Having a mentor from the LGB community increased perceptions of support among students in learning how to be a functioning member of the community, as well as assisting students with overcoming issues in their lives, increasing well-being, and pathways to success as a college student (Ross, 2005). Overall, mentoring programs have incredible potential to provide LGBT+ students with a support system all while improving their mental health and personal development.

A study conducted over a three month period evaluating a Texas community youth group seeking to support LGBT youth found that sexual and gender minority students were more empowered to accept their identity as the mentoring program provided a safe space for their development (Romijnders, Wilkerson, Crutzen, et al., 2017). LGBT youth participants in the study also reported increases in self-esteem as a result of the empowering mentorship environment (Romijnders et al., 2017). Likewise, a study examining students and informal mentoring found that LGBT mentees sought prospective mentors who had qualities such as liberal viewpoints, genuine interest in their personal and academic lives, capacity to assist with career development, and a commitment to preventing bullying (Mulcahy, Dalton, Kolbert, et al., 2016). Mentees also valued their mentors' willingness to better understand the experiences of LGBT students and engage in normalizing conversations around the LGBT community (Mulcahy et al., 2016). Similar to the findings from the Romijnders, et al. (2017), study, participants in the Mulcahy, et al. (2016) study noted many benefits to having a mentor (even within an informal setting) and that such relationships lessened isolation and loneliness at school.

Lastly, an on-campus LGBT mentoring program for undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA found that participation in the program resulted in improvements in mental and emotional well-being and in-

creased self-esteem (O'Keefe, 2007). However, this was a program created without LGBT student input that specifically sought to provide mentorship around the coming out process for LGBT mentees. All of these studies underscore the need to create, consistently update, and implement LGBT+ mentorship programs that may assist youth, young adults, and undergraduate age students in combating a multitude of challenges and provide brave spaces to discuss topics such as coming out, online dating, or the benefits and challenges with using social media platforms (Nesi, 2020). Relatedly, LGBT+ undergraduate mentoring programs should ensure they not solely focus on coming out processes as there are many other obstacles related to oppression, discrimination, bullying, developing identities, and navigating life as an LGBT+ youth and young adult. In conclusion, there are a variety of benefits to LGBT+ student mentoring programs, but little scholarship exists that robustly translates findings into practical interventions at the college level. The next logical step for researchers examining the needs of LGBT+ youth may be to create a mentoring program by first surveying LGBT+ undergraduate students so that their current needs are understood and met through such a prospective program.

The current study aims to better understand the needs of LGBT+ undergraduate students from their perspective and utilize their experiences and perceptions to inform university approaches to promote social support and alleviate mental health challenges related to ongoing experiences of discrimination. Further, this study examines perceptions of what LGBT+ undergraduates consider useful in structuring a mentorship program, as well as suggesting the incorporation of their feedback in developing such a program.

The theoretical framework for this study centers upon minority stress theory that posits stigma, discrimination, and prejudice occurs at the individual, interpersonal, and structural levels having an impact

upon the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and physiologic processes with implications for the health and mental health of sexual and gender minority populations (Hatzenbuehler and Pachankis, 2016). With regard to the current study, such a framework can assist with assessing and understanding LGBT+ undergraduate student experiences of discrimination within previous and existing environments, and the factors that can ameliorate negative health or mental health outcomes such as supportive mentors and mentoring programs, as well as affirming family members, peers, teachers, and university settings.

The following research questions are addressed in the current study: 1) What are LGBT+ undergraduate student experiences with discrimination, and what are their sources of support? and 2) What are LGBT+ undergraduate student perceptions of mentors and mentoring programs that will make them feel more supported on campus?

Methods

Recruitment

Inclusion criteria for this study included identification as LGBT+, a current undergraduate student at a private Catholic Jesuit university in a large Mid-Western city, age 17 or older, and an ability to comprehend English. Students that identified as heterosexual and/or graduate students were not permitted to participate in this study and were excluded from subsequent analyses. Recruitment and study promotion was conducted via social media, word of mouth, a series of emails sent to residential life staff and student workers, and flyers hung across two campus settings. Social media posts were created and shared promoting the study via personal as well as school and departmental (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). The survey was also advertised through the university's student diversity and multicultural affairs department weekly newsletter sent to LGBT+ students. IRB approval was obtained from the primary author's institu-

tion prior to conducting research. Finally, the survey offered students an opportunity to enter a drawing for one of ten \$50 gift cards for participation.

Survey Design

The survey consisted of three sections including: sociodemographic characteristics, perceptions of mentoring, and experiences with discrimination. The survey was created via Opinio software so that all information could be stored securely. Informed consent was obtained prior to participants completing the survey. The institutional review board granted a waiver of documented informed consent so that individuals could participate without disclosing their identities to their parents. Participants were introduced to the purpose and themes of the survey, permitted to discontinue the survey at any time, and were informed that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Survey questions were developed by the principal investigator to understand specific perspectives of LGBT+ students with regard to mentoring, as well as perceptions of discrimination and acceptance of LGBT+ students across multiple environments. Thus, validity and reliability of survey questions were not tested, but they were created based on the assessment of existing research centering upon mentoring for LGBT+ students and the dearth of existing instruments and programs (Gershenfeld, 2014; Vaccaro, 2012).

Sociodemographic Variables. The sociodemographics section of the survey consisted of multiple choice questions related to participant social identities (e.g., age, race, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity), affiliated department or school, and year in school.

Perceptions of Mentoring. This section asked participants about their experiences with previous mentors or mentoring programs, as well as what they would like to see included in a prospective mentoring program. This section included questions

such as: *"I have/had a straight mentor"*, *"I have/had an LGBT+ mentor"* and *"I feel like I need an LGBT+ mentor"*. This set of questions consisted of "yes" or "no" responses. Additional questions: *"I've attended a mentoring program"* and *"I would join a LGBT+ mentoring program if offered"* were formatted via a Likert scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Additional questions elicited the type of mentor preferred (e.g., peer, faculty, adult), selection of topics to be addressed in the mentoring program, and one open-ended question seeking other prospective topics for a mentoring program.

Experiences with Discrimination.

This survey portion explored student experiences with discrimination, specifically on campus as a result of their gender, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. This section consisted of questions such as: *"I have faced discrimination due to my sexuality in general/at my university"*, *"I have faced discrimination due to my gender identity in general/at my university"*, *"I feel like my peers are accepting of my gender/sexuality"* and *"I feel like my teachers are accepting of my gender/sexuality"*. These were all Likert scale questions with responses ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with a N/A option if participants did not want to answer the question.

Analysis

For the sociodemographic section, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to understand the characteristics of the sample. Similarly, for the perceptions of mentoring and experiences of discrimination sections, frequencies of each response were listed to assess what participants most often experienced and the range of experiences within the sample. These data were presented to better understand what forms of discrimination participants faced at their university and what they would like out of a mentoring program.

Results from the open-ended qualitative question were de-identified and a code book was developed based on open review of re-

sponses in order to capture meaning across these responses using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Qualitative coding was first conducted by the primary investigator and then repeated by another qualitative methodologically trained research assistant. To determine inter-rater reliability, each research team member coded the same 50% of the responses. Coding similarities were compared among the coders and any inconsistencies were discussed. Codes were revised until at least 90% inter-rater reliability was achieved. Overall inter-rater reliability was 100% upon completion of the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Final codes were then combined into

qualitative themes representing suggested general topics for future mentoring programs.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

A total of 289 LGBT+ undergraduate students participated in this survey with 19 participants (13 cisgender and heterosexual, and 6 graduate students) excluded for not meeting inclusion criteria. The sample was predominately between the ages of 19-20 (47.8%), and identified as white (72%), cisgender female (65.7%), and bisexual (51.2%). A majority of participants were at freshman standing (38.8%) with majors predominately from within the College of Arts and Sciences (74.7%) (Table 1)

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics (N = 289)

Category	n/%
Age	
17-18	99 (34.3%)
19-20	138 (47.8%)
21-22	49 (17%)
23+	3 (1%)
Gender Identity	
Cisgender Female	190 (65.7%)
Cisgender Male	65 (22.5%)
Transgender Male	10 (3.5%)
Transgender Female	2 (.7%)
Nonbinary	26 (9%)
Other (agender, genderfluid, etc.)	7 (2.4%)
Sexual Orientation	
Bisexual	148 (51.2%)
Gay	40 (13.8%)
Heterosexual	69 (23.9%)
Pansexual	26 (9%)
Asexual	27 (9.3%)
Lesbian	1 (.3%)
Other (unsure, biromantic, etc.)	7 (2.4%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian	208 (72%)
Latinx/Hispanic/Latino(a)	35 (12.2%)
Asian or Pacific Islander	30 (10.4%)
African American	26 (9%)
Mixed Raced	14 (4.8%)
Other (Filipino, Middle Eastern, Ukrainian)	4 (1.4%)
College or School Affiliation	
College of Arts and Sciences	216 (74.7%)
School of Communication	31 (10.7%)
School of Business	16 (5.5%)
School of Education	15 (5.2%)
School of Social Work	11 (3.8%)
School of Nursing	10 (3.5%)
University Junior College	1 (.3%)
Undecided	9 (3.1%)

Experiences with Mentoring

Participants reported their experiences and perceptions of mentoring in general and with regard to a prospective mentoring program. Participants were more likely to report they currently have a straight mentor (52.9%) compared to those reporting a current LGBT+ mentor (16.3%). Participants were also more likely to report that in the past they had a straight mentor (71.3%) compared to those reporting a past LGBT+ mentor (20.1%). In addition, 57.8% of participants reported feeling like they needed an LGBT+ mentor. If participants were to be mentored, they reported wanting to be mentored by an upper class student (58.1%) (Table 2). While LGBT+ student re-

spondents reported both previous and current mentorship experiences with straight mentors, contrastingly a majority reported a current interest and need for an upper class LGBT+ mentor – perhaps underscoring the need for connection and mentorship by someone from a similar sociodemographic background with shared experiences.

Experiences with Discrimination

Participants were more likely to report experiencing discrimination due to their sexual orientation in life (41.2%) more so than while at the university (12.4%). Similarly, they were also more likely to report discrimination due to gender identity (30.8%) in life than at the university (10.8%).

Table 2. Perceptions of LGBT+ Mentoring Programs and Service

Question	n/%
I currently have a straight mentor (e.g., school community, work, etc.)	
Yes	153 (52.9%)
No	101 (34.9%)
In the past I had a straight mentor (e.g., school community, work, etc.)	
Yes	206 (71.3%)
No	48 (16.6%)
I currently have an LGBT+ mentor (e.g., school community, work, etc.)	
Yes	47 (16.3%)
No	207 (71.6%)
In the past I had an LGBT+ mentor (e.g., school community, work, etc.)	
Yes	58 (20.1%)
No	197 (68.2%)
I feel like I need a LGBT+ mentor	
Strongly Disagree	0 (0%)
Disagree	12 (4.8%)
Neutral	74 (25.6%)
Agree	110 (38.1%)
Strongly Agree	57 (19.7%)
If I were to join a college mentoring program I would prefer to be mentored by someone who is:	
Staff	138 (47.8%)
Faculty	164 (56.7%)
Graduate Student	118 (40.8%)
Adult in Community	80 (27.7%)
Upper class student	168 (58.1%)
Lower class student	6 (2.1)
All of the above	28 (9.7%)
Other	5 (1.7%)

In a prospective mentoring program what topics would you like to see addressed?

Mental health	224 (77.5%)
Activism	208 (72%)
Intersectional identities	178 (61.6%)
Legislation	177 (61.2%)
Coming out	175 (60.6%)
Sexual health	175 (60.6%)
LGBT+ history	161 (55.7%)
LGBT+ in other countries	150 (51.9%)
Safe Space	137 (47.4%)
Other topics	114 (39.4%)

Overall, participants reported feeling that peers at their university were accepting of their sexuality (64.4%) and/or gender identity (67.3%). Similarly, participants reported that they felt teachers were accepting of their sexuality (50.5%) and/or gender identity (61.6%). A majority of participants reported feeling that their university was accepting of the LGBT+ community (62.2%), and that there was a lot of LGBT+ visibility (43.3%). However, 56.4% reported that the university's acceptance of the LGBT+ community could be improved. Finally, 46.4% of participants reported feeling neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the statement: "*I feel like (University) Administration is supportive and listens to the LGBT+Community*" (Table 3). Notable to these findings, LGBT+ undergraduates reported more discrimination experiences outside of their time spent at the university which aligns with feeling acceptance and support from peers and teachers at the institution, while they also clearly noted room for improvement at the institution.

Future Mentoring Programs

With regard to a list of topics to include within a prospective mentoring program, and revisiting results found in Table 2, participants identified mental health (77.5%), activism (72%), and intersectional identities (61.6%) as most important to address. Additionally, participants suggested 32 other topics they would like to see a prospective mentoring program cover. These suggestions were then combined into higher level themes listed in Table 4. The most common overarching themes to address in mentorship for LGBT+ youth were overall identity and wellbeing (31.25%) and managing relationships (25%). For example, issues pertaining to intersectionality, identity, self-image, and mental health were cited as aspects of well-being that would be important to discuss in a mentoring environment. Regarding managing relationships, participants endorsed wanting to focus on LGBT+ community building, coming out, family, discussing relationships, and ally-ship. These suggested topics align with the many challenges and resultant problems faced by

current generations of LGBT+ youth and young adults.

Table 3: Experiences with Discrimination

Questions	<i>n</i>/<i>%</i>
I have faced discrimination due to my sexual orientation in general	
Strongly Disagree	12 (4.2%)
Disagree	48 (16.6%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	40 (13.8%)
Agree	107 (37%)
Strongly Agree	27 (4.2%)
N/A	7 (2.4%)
I have faced discrimination due to my gender identity in general	
Strongly Disagree	53 (18.3%)
Disagree	62 (21.5%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	23 (8%)
Agree	63 (21.8%)
Strongly Agree	26 (9%)
N/A	14 (4.8%)
I have faced discrimination due to my sexual orientation while at (University)	
Strongly Disagree	62 (21.5%)
Disagree	90 (31.3%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	43 (14.9%)
Agree	29 (10%)
Strongly Agree	7 (2.4%)
N/A	10 (3.5%)
I have faced discrimination due to me gender identity while at (University)	
Strongly Disagree	83 (28.7%)
Disagree	84 (29.1%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	31 (10.7%)
Agree	21 (7.3%)
Strongly Agree	10 (3.5%)
N/A	12 (4.2%)
I feel like my peers accept my sexual orientation and overall identity	
Strongly Disagree	2 (.7%)
Disagree	7 (2.4%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	36 (12.5%)
Agree	125 (43.3%)
Strongly Agree	61 (21.1%)
N/A	9 (3.1%)

I feel like my peers accept my gender identity and overall identity

Strongly Disagree	3 (1%)
Disagree	6 (2.1%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	27 (9.3%)
Agree	95 (32.9%)
Strongly Agree	99 (34.4%)
N/A	11 (3.8%)

I feel like my teachers accept my sexual orientation and overall identity

Strongly Disagree	1 (.3%)
Disagree	6 (2.1%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	67 (23.2%)
Agree	101 (34.9%)
Strongly Agree	45 (15.6%)
N/A	21 (7.3%)

I feel like my teachers accept my gender identity and overall identity

Strongly Disagree	3 (1%)
Disagree	5 (1.7%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	37 (12.8%)
Agree	103 (35.6%)
Strongly Agree	75 (26%)
N/A	17 (5.9%)

I feel that overall (University) is accepting of the LGBT+ community

Strongly Disagree	5 (1.7%)
Disagree	14 (4.8%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	41 (14.2%)
Agree	127 (43.9%)
Strongly Agree	53 (18.3%)
N/A	1 (.3%)

I feel like the acceptance of the LGBT+ community at (University) could be improved

Strongly Disagree	1 (.3%)
Disagree	8 (2.8%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	67 (23.2%)
Agree	110 (38.1%)
Strongly Agree	53 (18.3%)
N/A	2 (.7%)

I feel like there is a lot of LGBT+ visibility on campus

Strongly Disagree	12 (4.2%)
Disagree	63 (21.8%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	41 (14.2%)
Agree	91 (31.5%)
Strongly Agree	34 (11.8%)
N/A	0 (0%)

I feel like (University) Administration is supportive and listens to the LGBT+ community

Strongly Disagree	10 (3.5%)
Disagree	33 (11.4%)
Neither Disagree nor Agree	91 (31.5%)
Agree	71 (24.6%)
Strongly Agree	22 (7.6%)
N/A	14 (4.8%)

Table 4. Qualitative Themes of Prospective Mentoring Topics

Theme (Sub-codes)	Frequency (%)
Overall Identity and Well-being (e.g., intersectionality, identity, self-image, mental health)	10 (31.25%)
Managing Relationships (e.g., LGBT+ community building, coming out, family, discussing relationships, allyship)	8 (25%)
Dealing with a Homophobic World (e.g., experiencing discrimination, coping with discrimination, discussing systemic issues)	5 (15.62%)
Navigating Religion and Religious Affiliated Spaces (e.g., navigating university as an LGBT+ individual, religion)	4 (12.5%)
Advocacy (e.g., wanting more resources, safe space, activism)	4 (12.5%)
Workplace Management (e.g., professionalism, financial)	3 (9.37%)

Discussion

This study was conducted to better understand the needs of LGBT+ undergraduate students from their perspective and utilize their experiences and perceptions to inform mentorship programming as well as university approaches to promote social support and alleviate mental health challenges related to ongoing experiences of discrimination. Further, this study examined perceptions of what LGBT+ undergraduates would consider useful in structuring a mentorship program, as well as suggesting the incorporation of their important feedback in developing future programs. Implications from the findings of this study are further discussed below.

Type of mentor. Participants in this study were more likely to report having a previous or existing straight-identified mentor more so than an LGBT+ mentor, while overall reporting a current desire for an LGBT+ mentor. This discrepancy may be associated with a lack of visibility, access, or connectedness to LGBT+ mentors in previous settings prior to undergraduate studies (e.g., elementary or high school, church, neighborhood). An interview based study by Graham (2019) supported this finding and found that many of the LGBT+ students interviewed reported having difficulty connecting with LGBT+ mentors in high school and college. This finding has notable implications for educators, administrators, and counselors across the sectors of primary, secondary, and higher education as they connect LGBT+ students with internal and external supportive or mentoring services, provide LGBTQ+ affirming training, organize GSAs, promote inclusive messages on social media platforms, and ensure the creation of protective policies within their institutions (Stargell, Jones, Akers, et al., 2020; Swanson and Gettinger, 2016).

Relatedly, participants reported wanting an older LGBT+ student mentor (e.g., upper-class) or an LGBT+ faculty or staff mentor rather than other types of mentors. Students may seek connections with LGBT+

people closer to their age group, while at the same time valuing connections with older LGBT+ mentors who can share more lifetime experiences and challenges as an LGBT+ person, as well as useful solutions. Multiple studies of Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs have highlighted the strengths of having an adult mentor, demonstrating that such mentoring can lower likelihood of substance use, truancy, and enhance confidence inside and outside of school, as well as improve mental health and social skills (Dewit, Lipman, Grossman and Tierney, 1998; Manzano-Muguia, et al., 2007; Schnabel-Kuehn, 2009). While an upper-class LGBT+ student mentor could potentially assist an undergraduate LGBT+ mentee with acclimating to the university culture and environment, they may not be able to speak to life beyond college, such as navigating professional endeavors. Ultimately it may be important to identify additional positive social supports for LGBT+ students that may include other LGBT+ adults (e.g., faculty, staff, community members) as mentors due to the vast benefits that a mentee may receive from both types of mentorship.

Positive social supports. In addition to formal and informal mentors for LGBT+ undergraduates, studies conducted by [Removed for Review, 2016] and Linley, Nguyen, Brazelton, et al., (2016) found that LGBTQ faculty often acted as effective supports for LGBTQ college students in the classroom through discussion of LGBTQ topics and combating heterosexism, cissexism, homophobia, or transphobia. Such support was found to be positively impactful outside of the classroom, whether serving as mentors or allies in guiding students through their studies, providing advocacy when necessary and any assisting with any potential hardships [Removed for Review, 2016]; Linley, et al., 2016. Open and out LGBT+ educators, administrators, counselors, and staff members may provide inspiration and act as visible positive symbols for LGBT+ students who may not have met or seen other such role models within previous education-

al settings [Removed for Review, 2014].

Participants from this study also noted that their university was mostly supportive of the LGBT+ community, such that their peers and teachers were accepting of their gender and sexual identities, and they experienced significantly less discrimination while at their university than in the outside world. This is notable for several reasons, including the fact that participants from the current study attend a Catholic Jesuit institution, and such sentiments are atypical from those expressed by many LGBT+ students who have reported feeling oppressed and constrained within other Catholic schools due to homophobic cultures and students, and a lack of support from administrators (Callaghan, 2016; Parodi-Brown, 2019). However, most notably, these studies also noted that LGBT students are often able to identify many sources of resiliency to counter such oppression or discrimination (Callaghan, 2016; Hughes, 2015; Parodi-Brown, 2019).

To offset some of the challenges faced by LGBT+ students within private and public, faith-based, and non-religious universities and colleges, there must be access to resources such as LGBT+ clubs, and visibility of non-discrimination policies, and overall social supports (Poteat, Scheer, & Mereish, 2014). Along those lines, the university examined in this study has several clubs for LGBT+ students including one specifically for LGBT+ people of color, an office that focuses on supporting LGBT+ students with annual programs, openly out LGBT+ staff, faculty members and allies, safe space workshops, several all gender bathrooms, non-discrimination policies for students and employees, and inclusive LGBT+ residential housing policies. Such resources at this university likely assist with the promotion of a supportive and affirming culture and increased LGBT+ visibility on campus, while also positively influencing how peers, staff, and educators interact with LGBT+ students.

While feelings of acceptance were higher than expected in the current sample,

the majority of participants also agreed or strongly agreed that acceptance of the LGBT+ community could be improved upon. Additionally, participants were most likely to indicate feeling neutral about whether there was adequate support from university administration for LGBT+ students, underscoring a key area for improvement across the university. Diehm and Lazzari (2001) note that in order for a university community to feel continuously supported, the administration must stay in purposeful conversation, collaborate, and engage in systemic planning with all marginalized groups, which may not be happening as frequently as needed at the university under study. Overall, it remains clear that there are many avenues for colleges and universities to create additional programming and spaces to intentionally facilitate affirming experiences for LGBT+ students, so that they positively benefit from resources including mentorship (Cohan & Patron, 2019; Renn, 2017).

Creating LGBT+ mentoring programs. Lastly, this study examined topics that participants would most like to see included within a prospective LGBT+ undergraduate student mentoring program. From a predetermined list of topics related to mental health, LGBT+ legislation, and intersectionality, participants also suggested additional mentoring topics that fit within the overarching themes of enhancing their identity and well-being, forming relationships, managing homophobia, engaging in advocacy, navigating religion and religious spaces, and workplace management. Based upon these findings, prospective LGBT+ mentoring programs should consider incorporating such topics into their existing or future services, as well as to ensure such programming or training does not conflate the unique needs and lived experiences of sexual and gender minority youth. What remains most notable from this study is the suggestion to focus on mental health related topics, which may be correlated with participant self-report of mental health challenges, underscoring the high rates of minority

stressors often experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ youth community (APA, 2017; Hatzenbuehler and Pachankis, 2016).

Ultimately there are unique opportunities for universities and colleges to develop affirming mentorship programs and services for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults in order to provide support and address underlying health and mental health concerns. The findings from this study underscore the need to help students enhance their self-identity and self-esteem as LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as to emphasize their resilience in navigating experiences of oppression and discrimination. A prospective mentoring program for LGBTQ+ undergraduates must include strategies for how to navigate life-long experiences of oppression and discrimination in safe and healthy ways, while instilling messages of positive self-worth, moxie, and capacity for resilience. In addition to such school related programs and resources, it remains clear that other sources of community and family support can collectively enhance resilience and optimize the health and mental health of LGBTQ+ youth, young adults, and undergraduates (Wilson and Cariola, 2020).

Limitations. There are various limitations of the current study that follow. First, the faculty, staff, and student population of the university under study is predominately comprised of straight, white, and cisgender females. The current sample was not representative of the larger LGBTQ+ undergraduate student community, as it is increasingly more diverse and includes non-binary, queer, asexual, demisexual, omnisexual, questioning, and other members of the more expansive "+" communities. Relatedly, future research should separately assess the perceptions and needs of LGBTQ+ students across the spectrum of sexual and gender diversity to understand their uniquely lived experiences. In addition, graduate students were excluded from the sample. Studies examining the impact of LGBTQ+ mentoring programs should include graduate and doctoral students in the future, as they have unique needs and may equally benefit from

such supportive services. Additionally, participants self-selected to participate in this study, so this may have biased results favoring those seeking an LGBTQ+ mentoring program. Finally, the scales used in this study were not previously validated, but still retain substantial importance in examining the current aims. Despite such limitations, this study highlighted marginalized voices that are often omitted from research and programming design. This study helps fill an important gap in the literature as there remains a dearth of research related to supportive and impactful resources and mentoring programs for LGBTQ+ undergraduate students. As a direct result of this research, the university under study has since created a mentoring program for LGBTQ+ students, emphasizing the important implications of these findings.

Conclusions

This study sought to better understand the needs of the LGBTQ+ undergraduate student community at one Midwestern mid-sized Jesuit university in order to inform future mentorship programming and supportive services. Results suggest that future LGBTQ+ student mentoring programs would be highly valuable to implement across all university and college communities. Such LGBTQ+ mentoring programs should be tailored to best meet students' needs to promote a more welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students and include appropriate administrative support and funding. An LGBTQ+ mentoring program could be structured via individual meetings or small group format to address specific issues such as mental health, policy and legislation, or intersectional identities (e.g., race, migrant status, ability) across the LGBTQ+ community. An LGBTQ+ mentoring program might also raise visibility on campuses for LGBTQ+ students and allies alike while creating important connections between such communities. Finally, a vocal, affirmed, and supported LGBTQ+ community that is visible on campus can often succeed in advocating for

the unique needs of their community with the larger university administration. Therefore, creating an LGBT+ mentoring program can help to ameliorate a variety of mental health concerns, connect undergraduate LGBT+ students with important resources, and promote mutual aid through connections with members of their community that have experienced similar stressors.

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