

# Amplifying Student Voices: LGBTQ+ Focus Groups with the SDCCCD

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Q. What can you learn about SDCCD's Queer-Identifying students from the information below? How would you use these data for advocacy?

Sexual Orientation	City		Mesa		Miramar	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Bisexual	552		586		283	
Gay or Lesbian/Homosexual	517		432		219	
Other	311		151		93	
<b>Total LGBTQ</b>	<b>1,380</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>1,169</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>6%</b>
Decline to State	1,002		1,099		753	
No Selection	1,254		1,584		1,097	
<b>Total Decline/No Selection</b>	<b>2,256</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>2,683</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>1,850</b>	<b>18%</b>
Straight/Heterosexual	8,814	<b>71%</b>	11,138	<b>74%</b>	7,629	<b>76%</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>12,450</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14,990</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10,074</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: CCCApply (July 2020)

A: Beyond basic and imperfect frequencies, not much! As for advocacy, you can't operationalize these data except to prove LGBTQ+ students exist and deserve services on our campuses. In short...



# Agenda

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1. Positionality and Institutional Context
2. Project history and intention
3. Recruitment and methodology
4. Analysis and Results: what the students have to say
5. Data in action
6. Future directions and Lessons Learned
7. Let's get applied!

# Researcher Positionality

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My name is Jaime

My pronouns are they/them/theirs

I am a non-binary and queer person

I am a research and planning analyst with the SDCCD

I started with the district in Fall 2017; joined OIER in Spring 2018

Master of Arts in Applied Anthropology from the University of South Florida

Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from Southern Illinois University

Completed first two years of college at San Diego Mesa College

# Context

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- The SDCCD comprises four colleges:
  - San Diego City College
  - San Diego Mesa College
  - San Diego Miramar College
  - San Diego College of Continuing Education (non-credit)
- Located in San Diego County including diverse communities and service areas
- The SDCCD serves approximately 100,000 students each year (SDCCD Facts on File 2020)

# Project History and Intention

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- SDCCD Board of Trustees call for increased data on LGBTQ+ students.
  - Researcher initiative
  - Collaboration with leaders, campus employees, and faculty
- Intention
  - Actionable results
  - Heightened involvement of IE/IR
  - Compilation of District and community resources
  - Accountability and transformation
    - Data sharing
    - Presentation of focused data
    - Continuation of research efforts in the future

# Why focus groups?

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- Focus groups were selected as the first step
  - Limitations of CCC Apply Data
  - Lack of prior research
  - Honor the complex identities of our students
  - Get rich data on student challenges and successes to better inform LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts
- Limitations:
  - Not generalizable
  - Bias in recruitment
  - Small sample of students



# Recruitment

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- Recruitment began in Spring 2020 in person
  - LGBTQ+ champions
  - Student organizations (e.g. GSA, ICC)
  - Flyers
  - 1 group conducted on Zoom
- Virtual recruitment continued into Summer and Fall 2020
  - Continued working with champions
  - Opened up recruitment to social media and email blasts
  - 3 groups conducted on Zoom
- Challenges:
  - Reaching students
  - Student safety
  - Incentive funds
  - Recruiting non-credit students in the virtual environment
  - Zoom burnout

# Recruitment

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- Participants (n=9) included new SDCCD students, returning students, Veterans, parents, various disability statuses, and students with varying ethnicities such as Filipinx, Latinx, Black, white, Asian, and multiple ethnicities.
- Students also had different educational goals and majors, such as marketing, English, dance, Black studies, and transferring to a four-year.
- All students identified as members the LGBTQ+ community

# Methodology

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- Informed consent
- Predetermined questions, but room for participants to discuss whatever they choose
- Focus group recordings were transcribed by two researchers prior to conducting analysis via thematic coding

# Results: Overview of Themes

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- Several themes emerged from the focus groups:
  - Identity
  - Sense of belonging
  - Experiences
  - Challenges
  - Successes
  - Recommendations
- In interest of time, I am reading one quote per category, denoted by a star.

# Identity: More than our Letters

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- LGBTQ+ students are more than their gender or sexuality, though those facets of their identity are important.
- Students identified themselves by interests, hobbies, and beliefs as well as other identities including disability, parenthood, and ethnicity or race.

# Identity: More than our Letters

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I'm trans masculine, was genderqueer, but now I think I've established after talking to my girlfriend as a gender f\*\*\*. So even when I was like high femme, you know I was working on cars and like weightlifting and stuff... so hopefully in a couple years I'll be able to rock a full beard and some thigh high heels, you know?...I'm like, I want people to look at me and go what the f\*\*\*? Yeah, I'm also a blanket queer, gay, but I'm women preferenced.

-Miramar College participant

To start off, I just want to say that I am a student first and foremost. And I love educating other people...So, I am non-binary. I transitioned about five years ago in early 2015 and I've been on the journey ever since. I originally came out as a child when I was twelve, and that was coming out as gay...I've been the happiest I've been these last few years after I transitioned.

-Mesa College participant

I am an asexual lesbian so far at least... I am ADHD, I am mentally ill, I think I'm the youngest person in this virtual chat room, I am also in the chronic pain community, and this is about intersecting identities, right? I am also very crafty like most of you all apparently. And I love storytelling, I don't know what else... I do digital art, I've done a lot of pottery, burned flowers, so costuming, that kind of stuff.

-Miramar College participant

I am a trans woman, I go by her/hers...my sexuality is that I am a straight woman. I have been married to my husband now for 10 years. I'm an artist. I am an entrepreneur. I am a first generation homeowner in my family.

-City College participant

I use gay, I usually try to say queer because I like the queer is kind of all-encompassing like you don't have to even be the same gender loving person to be queer... I just like queer because it's like everybody can get hugged with queer.

-Mesa College participant



# Sense of Belonging: In and Out of the Margins

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- While LGBTQ+ students saw positive imagery and messaging on campus, they did not necessarily feel included throughout their experience with the SDCCD.
- Transgender and non-binary students reported feeling less included than the cisgender gay community, and bisexual students also noted experiencing biphobia from classmates.
- Students do not feel represented in the curriculum in terms of their queer identities.

# Sense of Belonging: In the Margins



Definitely don't feel represented in the curriculum because they don't ever... Like, I haven't been privileged to take any LGBT studies but even when I took Black Sexuality, he did mention a couple of different... like the Harlem Renaissance, if you're familiar with it. In the 1920s with lots of Black art and lots of gay Black people. Like LOTS. But he didn't address that part of the culture, which was important...A lot of them were self-identifying queer people and just not bringing that up is an erasure of a part of history that, for me, I already know has happened to Black people.

-Mesa College participant

I haven't felt myself necessarily represented. I feel like the trans community especially the non-binary community is such a small portion that we get even less news or talk about us whereas the gay community is a lot bigger and a lot more well-known. I feel that it is easier for some students to feel represented, but I haven't really felt like there has been that level of... Like there's other people like you and I've always sort of felt like that weirdo kid that sits in the back.

-Mesa College participant

I will say I had an experience with a student in my first year who was using slurs and stuff when the professor couldn't hear. They couldn't identify me because I am very gender conforming so far. But it made me feel unsafe and kind of delayed my coming out and made me feel uncomfortable in that class. I didn't tell anyone so part of that's kind of on me, but I also feel like if the school was more pro-LGBT, maybe those people wouldn't come or say those things or feel comfortable expressing that.

-Miramar College participant

I've used the counseling center a time or two... I immediately stopped when one of the counselors informed me that I would have a better chance of getting into whatever college I can't remember what it was, if I went for LGBT studies after I had made no mention that I was doing anything with LGBT folk... [This happened] probably last fall or...Yeah, like 2019 for sure...My reaction at that point was that I'm not doing LGBT studies, I'm doing a marketing major and I tried to brush it off. But then they were like still you should think about this kind of aggressively towards me and I was like okay I think I'm done...And I haven't been back to counseling since I've just kind of done it one my own or called to get answers.

-Mesa College participant



# Sense of Belonging: Intersectionality Matters

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- Queer and Transgender Students of Color feel less represented on campus and in the curriculum.
- Multiple marginalization's adds to feelings of invisibility as students negotiated their racial/ethnic and queer identities in different contexts.

# Sense of Belonging: Intersectionality Matters

I can see white people in the community all the time, in all the communities I Belong to. They're in the black community, there in the LGBTQ+ Community, they're at school, they're everywhere, but I have never seen either of you...In fact, I felt alone. And even when I heard about this group, I was like, who the hell gonna come, a bunch of white people? That's what I thought. So I was like, let me pull up because representation matters, so I'm really happy to see both of y'all here for the representation that I feel doesn't often get the platform that they need.

- Mesa College Participant

I'm mixed, so I'm half Black and half Filipino, and I always found it kind of hard growing up, like knowing where I fit in and where do I belong. It's almost like until recently I don't really feel like I found that group. Because in high-school I was part of GSA, was the president of GSA my senior year, and it was crazy to me that some of my closest friends wouldn't even accept the fact that I came out as bisexual.

-Mesa/Miramar College participant

And that too, right? Like, how many Trans people of color [are on campus]? That's another thing that's really hard for me and that's kind of what I want to reiterate because my daily life on campus seems really chill and good and happy and hunky dory but when it comes to actually feeling included in a lot of things, I don't, right? It's just really hard.

- Miramar College Participant

I had this English class and the teacher was an older white gentleman and...we were debating about the death penalty in an English class... I was the only black person in that class...I was on the side supporting the death penalty...So when the white girl on the other side of the room said ...well as a Black person, knowing that 80% of the people on death row are Black, don't you think that you should change your mind? And I waited for him to intervene because you're not supposed to do that but since he didn't, I said, first of all, you can't directly address anybody ... and the professor goes, well she's not being racist...I went to the dean and when I say they handled it...They handled it, and that made me feel more safe ...

-Mesa College participant

# Student Experiences: Challenges

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- LGBTQ+ students experience challenges that are not always related to their queer identities.
- Students found it difficult to locate both general and specific resources.
- Lack of queer centers on campus.
- Sparseness of all gender bathrooms on some campuses.

# Student Experiences: Challenges

I will say that I had a little bit of trouble the past couple of weeks we had an issue with [the LGBTQ+ club] and we were trying to reach out to whoever we needed to, to figure out if we were allowed to not allow this person back or that sort of thing. [Another student] helped out a lot with that and we had issues figuring out what our rights were and who to go to.

-Miramar College participant

... They [the college] were talking about having a pride center but you know what they were piggybacking it off of? A lactation center for new moms... And I got pissed because that's another gender conformity. That's basically you saying women are more tolerant of LGBTQ people than other people but that's ignorant because there are some women that aren't and they're breastfeeding their babies and they might not want us to walk through where they're breastfeeding their kids....It was very frustrating so... write this down Jaime: "NO"... We need a pride center. I agree with you 100% we need a space to decompress. Just being able to be there because you go home and you might have to change into your gender-specific clothes to go to your home and then you go to school... and you get to express yourself there and you might need a place to just decompress and be away from your home because the campus is a reflection of your home. There's more people on the campus that believe what your home believes. You know? ... The moms could come in there and breastfeed their kids if they want to, but to say like 'this is the space that y'all have to share' isn't inclusive.

-Mesa College Participant

So it's just really frustrating kind of going off topic but I think it's really important that our voices are heard because a lot of people don't understand and they don't know. And that's what's really frustrating. They don't understand that me having to go pee I literally have to go down a flight of stairs, and then walk about a football field length away to go to a gender nonconforming bathroom. And then pray that it's available. It's frustrating.

-Miramar College Participant



# Student Experiences: Successes

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- Equity centered focus of the District has helped with sense of belonging.
- Good experiences accessing certain services such as mental health.
- The presence of out faculty and staff members is a positive influence.
- Hardworking faculty and staff allies and LGBTQ+ champions create events and spaces for students.
- The focus groups were considered a success by some participants who were surprised the District was interested in what they had to say.

# Student Experiences: Successes



I was kind of shocked, I was like, "I never would have thought," you know, obviously, I never felt like the campus didn't care about the LGBT students, but I also never really would of imagined that they would have cared to the degree of like "let's actually get you know some feedback and see how we can improve and see what it's like for them." I really want to thank you both for taking the time to ask people these questions to kind of get the full back story of what it is like for us students to be taking these classes, to be on campus, to be online, and just ways that we can kind improve and make life easier for future students, for the community.

-City/Mesa/Miramar participant

I will say that I had a wonderful experience with the mental health counseling. I was referred by another member [of the LGBTQ+ club] to an LGBT safe... I think one or two counselors in the health center. I made an appointment and stuff and it was wonderful. The food pantry is an excellent resource that I did not think I would use, but I have trouble with food sometimes so it is good to have that resource.

-Miramar College participant

I've had one professor who in passing mentioned her wife in a very casual and nonchalant way, which I thought was great for that person and also for the conversation as a whole in that it was something that wasn't a big deal it was not made to be a big deal it wasn't "by the way I'm gay" but also the students didn't... I mean for a lot of them it might have went right over their head but I think that's great. Again, I only have a limited perspective being an incoming freshman; however, I could also give you a more biased opinion working with the LGBTQ+ club. I have corresponded with a lot of staff and faculty who are within the community or are strong allies of the community.

-Miramar College participant

I felt Mesa was a lot less fearless than [other colleges the student attended] and it seemed like Mesa didn't care if it was getting politically involved, if it was on the side of right, then I saw the pride flag, they started putting up the pride flag, they had pride shirts in the thing oh, you can't lose that, you can't lose. So I was like this is where I'm going to stay I'm going to stay here, Mesa.

-Mesa College participant

# Student Experiences: Recommendations

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- Improved communication
- More visible resources
- Accessible safe spaces and facilities
- LGBTQ+ studies or personal development class on “how to be a good human”
- Intersectional inclusion that never stops at “good enough”

# Student Experiences: Recommendations

I went to a college in Washington state that actually had a pride center, and I know we're trying to have one in the cultural center or whatever, but even then I feel like its unsafe because you have to walk through that center in order to get to our own space, which we don't have yet but I feel like even then... And [the pride center] was just queer. Everything was queer. I felt so safe and comfortable in that space and yeah I was 18 so I was really new out in the world and that really helped me a lot and opened my eyes to be able to have a safe place, because what if you're also a college kid who has not very welcoming parents? Maybe you want to spend all day in that center.

-Miramar College Participant

If every single educator, every person who teaches my children, the children that you may or may not have, children you may or may not know, the child that you was, the child down the street... every single teacher had to have safe zone training and cultural competency training, and if they didn't want to take them, they couldn't be a teacher... Wouldn't that change so much?

-Mesa College Participant

The only thing I would say, again, is that visibility for resources for LGBTQ+ students. To make those resources more widely available and visible would be my only suggestion to the college. I know the college and the District are working toward sensitivity training, inclusivity, those sorts of things and I think the college is moving in the right direction.

-Miramar College Participant

One thing that popped into my head I can't remember who sparked the idea but I thought of an inclusion class. So, something that goes, not necessarily into LGBT studies or Black studies or Chicano studies, something that will sort of include everything in a "how to be a good human" class. I think there should be more practical classes like how to be a good human, how to do your taxes, how to be more creative, and I think that there should be more non-structured classes where there's like books and everything and more discussion classes.

-Mesa College participant





# Summary of Conclusions

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- Identity
- Sense of belonging
- Challenges
- Successes
- Recommendations

# Action

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- Data sharing and presentation
  - Presented to the CCC LGBTQ Summit in April 2021 and CAIR in October 2021
  - Presentation to Board of Trustees
  - Work groups
  - Student groups (e.g. Miramar Club SPECTRUM)
  - Comprehensive report
- Enhanced trainings and employee spaces
  - Safe zone 2.0
- Compilation of resources for students
- City College Pride Hub!
- SDCCD BOT resolution



# Action

- Research can be a catalyst for more than just building knowledge
- As the conference theme suggests, we can use data for advocacy
- Further, the process of performing action research in this context allows the building of community amongst LGBTQ employees and allies
- Creation of SDCCD District Queer Alliance
- Creation of SDIQuA (San Diego Imperial Queer Alliance)



# Directions for Future Research/Action

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- Focus groups will continue virtually to increase the sample size
- In person groups will commence at San Diego College of Continuing Education once it is safer to meet in person
- Student survey (in review)
- Staff and faculty interviews (starting Spring 2021!)
- Continued collaboration between LGBTQ+ groups and IR/IE facilitated regionally by SDIQuA
  - Informed practices guide
- We plan to take a similar approach to DEI work with our Black Student Success Group after the success of the initial stages of the LGBTQ+ project

# Lessons learned!

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- Impact is worth the work if you have capacity despite difficulties with recruitment and laborious analysis phase
- While you cannot generalize, good qualitative data can inform survey work later on while providing extremely rich context for results
- Students feel heard and connected
- Ensure students from marginalized communities are connected to someone from their community during the research process when discussing sensitive topics (positionality matters)

# Let's Get Applied...

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- Reflect on the questions below to consider how your office could take a similar approach towards using qualitative data for advocacy.

What research on LGBTQ+ or other marginalized students populations is standard at my college, district, or university?

Do you include intersectional analyses?

Does it include hearing from students? In what modalities?

Why or why not?

What gaps do you have in your knowledge of these student groups and their experiences? Could qualitative work allow you to better connect the dots?

What logistical or resources would it take for your institution to be able to engage with students to better inform data? Who in your office or college could support this work?

# Thanks and Acknowledgments

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- SDCCD Leadership Team
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- City College champions: Dr. Adan Sanchez, Marciano Perez, Leslie Easton, and Selam Gebrekristos.
- Mesa College champions: Dr. Kevin Branson, Dr. Michael Harrison, and Dr. Mary Gwinn.
- Miramar College champions: Dr. Laura Gonzalez, Anna Liza Manzo, and Donnie Tran.

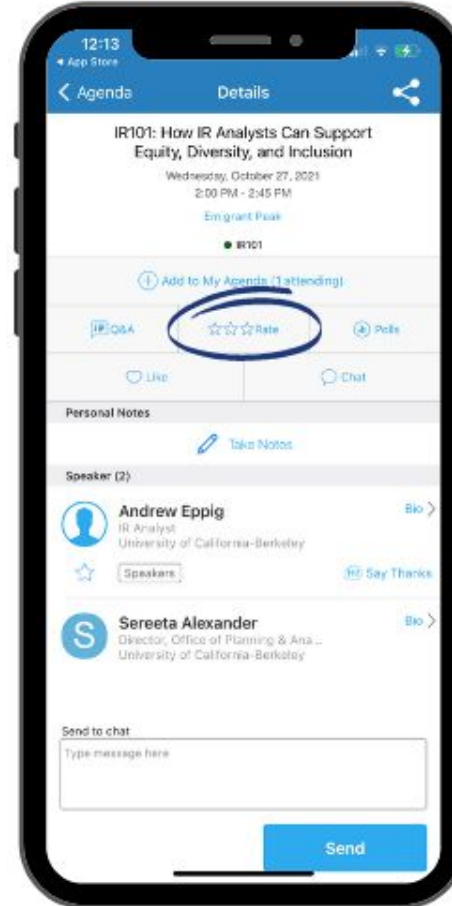
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# Any Questions?

*Any questions unanswered here can be directed to  
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