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COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS WITHIN THE LGBT* COMMUNITY

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HONORS PROJECT

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Abstract

The purpose of the literature review is to understand community connectedness in regards to LGBT* community resilience, and the interdependence that community connectedness may have with other, similar concepts. The literature review revealed strong ties between the concepts of community interaction, community involvement, and community connectedness including a process of development for community connectedness. In general, the LGBT* community is largely understudied, especially in terms of examining subgroups of the LGBT* community (e.g. transgender) or intersecting identities. Secondly, the purpose of the applied research was to carry out an educational event that would adequately inform attendees the information learned in the literature review. Although the event was successful in that it accomplished its purpose for those that attended, the overall attendance was quite low due to advertising barriers. However, the feedback provided from attendees was mostly positive and provided sufficient criticism which would allow for the improvement of the event in the future.

Introduction

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), people have the need to feel as if they belong in the world with which they live, as processed by belongingness theory. With the need to belong persevering through decades of research and across multiple psychological theories, the concept is clearly important not only to human society, but also to individuals (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 497). However, how is it that humans fulfill their desire to belong? According to Frost and Meyer (2012), individuals must develop a sense of “community connectedness,” which is the application of individuals’ “desires to belong to a larger collective” (p. 36). Although at first glance the concept of “community connectedness” seems simple, as just an application of an individual’s want towards a community, it quickly becomes apparent that the process is far more complex. Although community connectedness may be applicable to multiple communities of varying size, I am interested in its impact on the LGBT* community. Understanding the positive and negative impact that community connectedness may have on the LGBT* community will help me better work with LGBT*-identifying individuals as a social worker. However, community connectedness within the LGBT* community raises its own questions.

First, how does the concept of community connectedness impact the LGBT* community, positively and negatively, specifically when referring to community resilience, which is the ability for a community to reorganize itself after a traumatic event occurs that effects the entire community? Or, for that matter, how does the concept of community connectedness impact individuals’ mental health and individual resilience? However, to truly understand the impact that such a concept as community connectedness may have on either the LGBT* community or on LGBT* individuals, it is important to understand the way in which individuals develop a conscious sense of connection to the LGBT* community.

Further, LeBeau and Jellison (2009) argue that LGBT* friends, personal LGBT* identity, and direct interactions with the community itself are equally important to LGBT* individuals as a larger sense of community, which is, essentially, community connectedness. They conceptualize these factors as “community involvement” within the LGBT* community (p. 69). Such complexity raised other questions to be answered: How is the concept of community involvement intertwined with community connectedness? Are there other concepts that are related to community involvement and community connectedness?

Literature Review

Essential Terminology

Before answering the above questions, it is important to define the integral concepts that impact LGBT* community literature and research: Community and LGBT*. Simply defining these two concepts aids in understanding the impact that community connectedness may have on the overall community and on individuals identifying as LGBT*.

Community is a difficult concept to rigidly define as many individuals understand community differently. For instance, one person may view community as the people living within their city, while another may view community as an emotional bond. Another person may view community as encompassing multiple factors, or that there are essentially multiple requirements that must be met. For example, an individual would view community as the people living within their city and with whom they share an emotional bond. Lehavot, Balsam, and Ibrahim-Wells (2009) seem to argue that community is a psychological sense for many individuals with a minority identification, such as individuals identifying as LGBT* (p. 439-440). As a psychological sense, community “acts as a buffer against threats . . . and helps

[minorities] deal with changes in [their] world” (Lehavot et al., 2009, p. 440). However, Lehavot et al. (2009) acknowledges that psychological sense cannot be the entirety of community because communities for minority populations also provide safe spaces, socialization, resources, and the ability to advocate and participate in activism (p. 440). None of those opportunities could be provided without direct communication between individuals within a community.

Interestingly, changes in technology and society may alter the need for a geographically-based community. For instance, Lehavot et al. (2009) found that the emergence of the internet and various websites have provided locations for lesbian and bisexual women the opportunity to connect with other individuals of similar or same identities. Such communicative ability has broken the geographical barrier and provided more resources to LGBT*-identifying individuals who would otherwise be unable to access others from the community or necessary resources (p. 446).

However, LeBeau and Jellison (2009) found that gay and bisexual men used the internet to connect with the LGBT* community far less frequently than Lehavot et al. (2009) seem to predict. Not quite 10 percent of gay and bisexual men were introduced to the LGBT* community through the internet, with the next lowest introduction being formal organizations or events at over 25 percent of the men surveyed (LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 63). However, both studies were done before social media became as readily available as it is today through smartphones and tablets, which may affect the way in which people are introduced to, and communicate with, the LGBT* community. Such technology has allowed LGBT* individuals to better express themselves and advocate for inclusivity.

Determining what exactly LGBT* encompasses is difficult simply because LGBT* seems to stand for multiple lengthy acronyms. Typically, the full acronym seen today is

LGBTQQIP2SAA, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual, and ally (Clark, 2016). Although this acronym attempts to be all-inclusive through mentioning most umbrella terms, such as queer, asexual, and transgender, it places emphasis on specific identifications, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and two-spirit, which, arguably, devalues other identities. Further, there are arguments in the LGBT* community as to whether an ally can identify as part of the community itself. However, LGBT* allows for inclusivity and recognition with the asterisk, which is sometimes instead a plus symbol, allowing for acronym fluidity and inclusivity by not designating specifics of who “can” be in the community. The LGBT* term, and concept, also further allows for self-identification.

The LGBT* Community Roles

Although most LGBT* individuals believe the LGBT* community to be global and encompassing of all LGBT*-identifying individuals, there are many variations in the LGBT* community’s purpose that are considered when examining the LGBT* community at an individualized perspective. According to Wexler, DiFluvio, and Burke (2009), LGBT* youth rely on the LGBT* community in the sense of meeting similar individuals such as them that exist, or “others” outside of the heteronormative society so to speak (p. 568). According to Wexler et al., this is most important for LGBT* youth experiencing depression or suicidal ideation as it provides a “sense of purpose” through community connectedness, which in turn provides resistance to the heteronormative society and legitimacy and support of the LGBT* identity (p. 568-569). Understanding the roles of the LGBT* community for LGBT*-identifying individuals will allow professionals, such as social workers, to better aid the LGBT* population.

In social work, this understanding of the LGBT* community would be empowering and strengths-based.

However, there are other variations of LGBT* community from individual perspectives that are less concerned with survival and more concerned with socialization or politics.

According to LeBeau and Jellison (2009), over 60 percent of gay and bisexual men view the LGBT* community as a method of socialization, including friendship, romantic relationships, and diversity exposure (p. 63-64). Within the same study, LeBeau and Jellison (2009) reported that over 30 percent found the LGBT* community to be useful for political activism, including being a good role model for future generations (p. 64). However, according to Lehavot et al. (2009), such a perspective of LGBT* community does protect individuals in that it helps individuals combat loneliness and isolation (p. 445).

Defining Community Connectedness

With a better understanding of what LGBT* community means to individuals, it is easier to tackle concepts such as community connectedness, as outlined by Frost and Meyer (2012) through understanding concepts, such as “community interaction,” as I have termed it, and community involvement (Frost and Meyer, 2012; LeBeau and Jellison, 2009; & Lehavot et al., 2009).

Community interaction is any event or action in which an individual is exposed to the community, and may or may not be initial exposure (Frost and Meyer, 2012, p. 37; LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 63). Community interaction is important because it is a concrete, easily-measurable concept. For instance, an individual could experience LGBT* community interaction through a friend’s connections or through visiting a “gay bar.” However, such interactions could

go awry or be completely unplanned from the start, which could cause a negative impact on the individual's perception of not only the interaction, but also the LGBT* community overall. In a study done by LeBeau and Jellison (2009), almost 10 percent of gay or bisexual men had negative first interactions with the LGBT* community. On the flip side, over 65 percent of gay or bisexual men had positive first interactions with the LGBT* community (p. 62).

After an initial community interaction, individuals can choose whether they would like to further involve themselves in the LGBT* community. Community involvement is the way in which individuals can develop a positive and reciprocal relationship with a community. Informal involvement, also known as recreational involvement, specifically refers to the act of socialization such as gay bars or clubs and time with LGBT* friends (Frost and Meyer, 2012, p. 37; LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 61). Such socialization is positive as it provides interaction with other LGBT* individuals, and it is reciprocal because an individual is providing the LGBT* community with visibility in the overall society. Formal involvement, also known as professional involvement, refers to individuals partaking in LGBT* specific organizations, such as political organizations, LGBT* centers, and LGBT*-owned business (Frost and Meyer, 2012, p. 37; LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 62). Formal involvement provides a positive interaction through advocacy, and is reciprocal in nature through policy-making for the community and policy effects for individuals. Recurrent community involvement may allow individuals to develop attachment to the LGBT* community even if the interactions are not consistently positive (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 501-502).

Community connectedness, as defined by Frost and Meyer (2012), is the application of the need "to belong to a larger collective" in a way that develops a positive and mutually-beneficial relationship which constructs a shared emotional connection (p. 36). Essentially,

application of the need “to belong to a larger collective” is a voluntary LGBT* community interaction, while the development of a positive and mutually-beneficial relationship is community involvement. Without both aspects, Frost and Meyer (2012) argue that an individual cannot connect with a community, at least not easily. Furthermore, by this definition of community connectedness, it is impossible for individuals to feel connected to the LGBT* community if they are not voluntarily choosing to involve themselves.

This concept of community connectedness, therefore, tackles the assumption of LGBT*-identifying individuals automatically being assumed to be actively involved with the LGBT* community. Similarly, this can be applied to other minority, or majority, individuals who are assumed to be part of various communities based on their looks or behaviors. For example, African-American individuals are often assumed to be part of the Black community. Community connectedness, therefore, seems to assert that individuals cannot automatically be assigned to communities based on their personalities, appearance, behaviors, or history.

Developing Community Connectedness

Without individuals being automatically assigned to the LGBT* community, it becomes imperative to explain how that association between the individual and the community is formed from the individual’s perspective. Firm understanding of this concept may aid social work’s attempts to connect individuals to the LGBT* community and its resources. Primarily, an initial community interaction must take place in which an individual identifying as LGBT* is exposed to the LGBT* community. With 30 percent of bisexual and gay men experiencing either an ambivalent or negative initial community interaction, it is important for social workers to strive to connect LGBT* individuals with positive community interactions that will provide them with

the necessary foundation to develop a healthy connection to the LGBT* community (LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 62).

There are many ways in which individuals initially interact with the LGBT* community, including social networks comprised of family and friends, gay bars or clubs, organizations and other formally structured groups or events, and internet through social media or LGBT* friendly websites (LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 63). However, social work focuses primarily on connecting LGBT* individuals with formal social structures, such as an LGBT* resource center. Unfortunately, this may neglect the informal interactions, such as interacting with friends and going on online. Social workers aiding LGBT* individuals should be aware of online forums, as well as structured website resources, that individuals could utilize. Such websites often provide not only a connection to other LGBT* individuals through forums, but are also often identity specific, or at least umbrella-identity specific (e.g. transgender or asexual). An increase in resources offered to LGBT* individuals may allow them the options to determine the best initial community interaction for them, which may also increase the odds of it being a positive interaction. For instance, an individual who generally dislikes having to introduce themselves in front of others may be uncomfortable with attending an LGBT* meeting, but may be comfortable communicating their questions through forums online.

Although some individuals may have their initial community interaction in a way that overlaps with community involvement, such as LGBT* pride parades or an LGBT* bar crawl, more often individuals have their initial community interaction through mutual friendships (LeBeau and Jellison, 2009, p. 63). However, without developing a mutually-beneficial relationship with the LGBT* community, an individual is unable to develop a sense of

community connectedness. This, essentially, breaks community involvement down to the question of what can an individual do for the community?

With the LGBT* community being considered a global, all-inclusive entity by most LGBT*-identifying individuals, it is difficult to determine precisely what is beneficial to the community. Essentially, however, community involvement can be any activities that bring attention to the LGBT* community, whether that be normalizing LGBT* relationships at the bar or advocating for equal rights at a pride parade. Even if the events do not go as planned, they can still have a positive impact on individuals of the LGBT* community through simply standing in solidarity or fighting alongside other LGBT* individuals for rights. This creates the positivity needed for individuals and the community to develop the mutually-beneficial relationship.

The mutual benefit of the individual and the community will most likely eventually lead to a mutual emotional connection between the individual and other individuals. Within the LGBT* community, belongingness theory maintains that individuals will fight to preserve the emotional bond that they have developed with the community (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 502). Individuals will be reluctant to allow others to destroy the community which has connected them on an emotional, instinctual level to others who are like them. Further, they will be reluctant to allow the community to change in a way that would cause them to be pushed from the community and excluded (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 503).

Intersecting Identities

Of course, the LGBT* community is not defined by belongingness theory, as can be seen by the variety of experiences and needs across LGBT* identities and intersecting identities such as age, race, and religiosity. One challenge the older adult LGBT* population faces today is

overcoming fears of health and mental health professionals (Dentato et al., 2014, p. 318). Many of these individuals faced persecution for being mentally ill or diseased which led to many “therapies” that were not only unhelpful, but outright dangerous to their wellbeing. Such non-evidence-based practices included early electroconvulsive shock therapy, lobotomy, and genital mutilation. Fears of such medical practices often force elderly LGBT* individuals to release ties they may have with the LGBT* community as their health needs and living arrangements change with their aging bodies (Dentato, Orwat, Spira, & Walker, 2014, p. 317).

LGBT* individuals were also criminalized for their identities which resulted in job loss, family separation, a lack of personal safety, public humiliation, and jail time (Dentato, et al., 2014, p. 318). Although today many of these dangers are no longer a threat, the elderly LGBT* population experienced job loss, family loss and separation, lack of personal safety, and internalized shame or guilt. Furthermore, while the younger generation is beginning to receive attention within the media, the elderly LGBT* individuals struggle to remain visible within the LGBT* community. However, according to Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, and Stirratt (2009), age cohort did not impact community connectedness as based on an adapted community cohesion scale.

Like the elderly, the youth also struggle in the LGBT* atmosphere today, which is primarily focused on individuals who are lesbian, bisexual, or gay in their 20s with a focus on the bar scene. As Dentato et al. (2014) states, the LGBT* stereotype “is that of a young, handsome and virile” adult (p. 319). LGBT* teens and children face invisibility and an overwhelming lack of resources as well. As Eliason (2010) notes, there is an increasing number of young LGBT* individuals committing suicide, arguably pressing for cities and communities to restructure schools to provide more support, resources, and accurate education regarding

LGBT* topics (p. 4-5). Wexler et al. (2009) expand upon the concept by stating that LGBT* youth are also more likely to abuse alcohol, and that victimization is associated with suicidality (p. 568).

Without available resources and support systems in schools, LGBT* youth swiftly become the targets of violence, as displayed by high rates of harassment and bullying (Saewyc, 2011, p. 264). Further, support systems would protect LGBT* individuals from feeling as if they need to perpetuate violence to protect themselves. Saewyc (2011) states that youth who have same-sex attractions are twice as likely to be the perpetrators of violence than youth with different-sex attractions (p. 265). Unfortunately, such exposure to violence has led LGBT* youth to have a high prevalence of “emotional distress, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts” as compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Saewyc, 2011, p. 262).

However, this invisibility within the LGBT* community applies not only to the young and the old, but also to those of minority races. In California, the majority of African American LGBT* individuals do not live in geographically-based LGBT* communities, but instead in Black communities (Moore, 2010, p. 3). However, Black communities are typically quite resistant of LGBT* individuals expressing their identities, which has forced African American LGBT* individuals to rally and fight for their rights on their own. African American LGBT* individuals are often asking for equal rights and recognition in both the Black community and the LGBT* community, but the Black community is beginning to support the LGBT* community (Moore, 2010, p. 11). Historically, the Black community has rested on a religious foundation which typically was intolerant of LGBT* individuals (Walker and Longmire-Avital, 2013, p. 1724). This has led to many African American LGBT* individuals to internalize homonegativity and explore religion and spirituality on a personal basis, not seeking formal

religion institutions (Walker and Longmire-Avital, 2013, p. 1724-1725). Such information suggests a need for the LGBT* community to expand spirituality to encompass those individuals and possibly create religious institutions where such individuals are welcomed and accepted.

Although the LGBT* community is not historically religious, it may be necessary to develop safe, religious spaces in which Black LGBT* individuals may congregate for religious gatherings. Schneider and Roncolato (2012) argue that the LGBT* community has made movement into formalized churches, but that such religious institutions often drive away individuals who do not meet their stereotypes or whose other values are not in line with the typical “white middle class America” (p. 6). According to Walker and Longmire-Avital (2013), personal spirituality may correlate to less internalized homonegativity as it provides Black LGBT* individuals with a coping tool, even though religious institutions create internalized homonegativity (p. 1727).

African Americans are not the only racial group that has developed coping mechanisms through religion for use within the LGBT* community. According to Cheng (2016), religion has provided guidance in regards to self-hate and shame created through racism against Asian Americans (p. 3). Through feminist theology, Cheng (2016) asserts that sin is more a matter of self-hate than self-pride, creating a religious need to heal and cope with racism that perpetuates through the LGBT* community (p. 4). The examples that Cheng (2016) cites demonstrates not only blatant racism, but also blatant disregard for other LGBT* individuals of the LGBT* community (p. 4-5). These examples are incredibly important because Asian Americans do not have as large a voice in the country as do, say, African Americans, based on population.

The invisibility that bisexual-identifying individuals, and other lesser-known sexualities and genders, face within the LGBT* community is reflected by the lack of literature regarding

their specific problems (Balsam and Mohr, 2007, p. 306). Along with homonegativity in the outward society, bisexual men and women must also face binegativity and monosexism both in the LGBT* community and in society (Balsam and Mohr, 2007, p. 307). Furthermore, bisexual people are less likely than lesbian women or gay men to have visible role models in the LGBT* community and society or have accurate information provided to them on their sexuality.

Although the LGBT* community is rapidly improving, bisexual people and people of other identity subgroups within the LGBT* community still struggle to be seen.

Protecting against Discrimination

LGBT* individuals often face discrimination in the larger context of society and are regularly deciding on concealing or displaying their identity. According to Beals, Peplau, and Gable (2009), concealment is associated with decreased mental health whereas display is associated with mental health stability and overall well-being (p. 868). Besides the decision to conceal or display identity, there are other factors which determine mental health in LGBT* individuals. According to Burns, Kamen, Lehman, and Beach (2012), the minority stress model examines stressors within society impacting LGBT* individuals, and other minorities, by evaluating mental health (p. 659).

Further, Burns et al. (2012) demonstrates internalized homonegativity to be associated with reduced satisfaction with social support, whether that be from the LGBT* community or other communities with which individuals identify (p. 665). Unfortunately, this demonstrates that the LGBT* community may not be providing necessary safe spaces and resources to individuals who are struggling with internalized homonegativity. According to Burns et al. (2012), such

lacking support in communities is alarming as there is a negative correlation between social support and self-blaming and other-blaming (p. 666).

However, even without satisfactory social support, LGBT* individuals are capable of thriving in both society and the LGBT* community. According to Beasley, Jenkins, and Valenti (2015), the concept of resilience originates from child development research that now has a person-in-environment perspective, essentially meaning that resiliency is the person's interactions within their environment that allow them to recover from adversities (p. 165). Beasley et al. (2015) further argues that resilience in the LGBT* community is specific and may not be shown holistically through an individual's environments (p. 165).

Social workers understand the factors of an individual's success through the use of strengths-based practice. According to Hill and Gunderson (2015), social workers may use multiple strategies with LGBT* individuals to build resilience and develop and maintain mental health even in the face of adversity (p. 233). Social workers working with LGBT* individuals should be aware of these protective strategies to better assist clients. Promotive factors, such as an optimistic and future-oriented outlook, and harm-reduction factors, better known as coping mechanisms, are primary in avoiding decreases in mental health (Hill and Gunderson, 2015, p. 233).

Although the mental health of LGBT* individuals is important, physical health disparities are also important to note. According to Herrick, Friedman, and Stall (2012), HIV is the greatest health disparity that gay men experience, arguably caused by social marginalization and homophobia (p. 4). According to Herrick et al., 75 percent of U.S. individuals with HIV are men who report having had sex with men, with an increase of 26 percent annual increase in HIV and AIDS diagnoses each year between 2004 and 2007 (p. 5). Social marginalization and

homophobia does not provide LGBT* individuals with inclusive sexual education that would help protect individuals from contracting life-impacting diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

Future Research

With the growing societal interest in LGBT* research, advocacy, and activism, there is pressure to further, and more intricately, research many concepts regarding community connectedness and the LGBT* community. Primarily, a shift is needed in the research to reflect the LGBT* community on a whole, not just the individuals identifying as lesbian, bisexual, and gay. This may include the development of a more-inclusive scale.

Currently, most studies of LGBT* identities rely on measurements from the Kinsey Scale or the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) to determine individuals' sexual identities. According to Galupo, Mitchell, L., Gryniewicz, and Davis (2014), both the Kinsey Scale and KSOG have expanded the understanding of sexual identity for people who identify as LGBT* (p. 404-405). However, Galupo et al. (2014) argues that the Kinsey Scale is outdated not because of its design, but rather by the way in which researchers today use it and categorize individuals into one of three categories: heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. In this way, the Kinsey Scale has lost the fluidity that it once presented to the social sciences (p. 405).

Furthermore, the KSOG, though succeeding initially to demonstrate the variety of factors involved in sexual identity, failed to pull sexual identity from the binary lens (Galupo et al., 2014, p. 406-407). Unfortunately, this can be seen throughout LGBT* research studies, even when the research being done is not focused on identity. Non-binary genders and identities are often lost under their perspective umbrella-identities. The lack of recognition being given to non-

binary experiences within the LGBT* community is alarming and requires development of scales that are inclusive of those experiences as well.

Although there is expansive information on identity development in regards to lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals, there is relatively limited information on identity development or connectedness to the LGBT* community in transgender individuals or individuals of lesser-known sexualities. Essentially, statements of community connectedness as applied to the whole LGBT* group are being formed by only a few of the group's many identities. Although it may, arguably, be impossible to include all identities, it would be possible to begin research that considers individuals under various umbrellas, such as transgender or asexual. Such research would allow for more ostracized members of the LGBT* community to explain their own community connectedness and the challenges they have personally faced in reaching that connectedness, or the barriers that have, potentially, kept them from being connected to the LGBT* community.

To further accentuate the problem of limited research, the research that was available in regards to intersecting identities often did not explain which communities such people felt they connected most with. For instance, Moore (2010) found that many Black lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals lived in the Black communities in California, even though they often had to hide or "tone down" their identity (p. 2-4). Even this research does not answer the question as to why they choose to connect with the Black community rather than the LGBT* community or both simultaneously.

Unfortunately, the limitations further impacted my literature review in that I was unable to adequately determine the impact that community connectedness has on the overall LGBT* community. Overall communities experience adversity, such memorable examples come to mind

as the black plague, the *Titanic* sinking, and the twin towers falling. The LGBT* community has a few adverse experiences that have impacted it, including the Stonewall Inn riots and the Orlando shooting. Such incidents effect overall communities, not only economically, but emotionally. I was hoping to better understand the impact that community connectedness had on the LGBT* community's ability to recover from LGBT* community-specific adversities. Hopefully future research with the LGBT* community will delve deeper into such interactions between community connectedness as a concept and the LGBT* community.

Applied Research Methodology

Social workers often find themselves in the position of helping communities tackle social injustice not only through advocacy, but also through education. Primarily, with social work education, it is unethical to present information that is inaccurate. Furthermore, all social work practice should be evidence-based, meaning that it is based on proven theories and research. This foundation of social work principals led to the literature review of the LGBT* community, the concept of community connectedness, and of the pros and cons that community connectedness may have on individuals within the LGBT* community.

Secondly, it is important for information to be adequately distributed to individuals, groups, or communities. Adequate distribution is attained by use of the best method in which the information is presented, the appropriate amount of detail in the information, and the relevance the information has on individuals' lives.

Presentations are a common method of distributing relevant, adequate information in social work. It allows for flexibility dependent on group size – as audience participation can be gauged based on group size – and often allows time for an activity to help the attendees

understand the information being presented. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to present the appropriate amount of information for each individual during a group event, it is acceptable to expect an event to not confuse or bore attendees.

One of the most challenging aspects of presentations, or group events in general, regarding information is maintaining relevance of that information for those attending. Primarily, it is taxing on the presenter to continuously confirm interest in the topic from the audience. Secondly, the presenter must also be continuously aware of the sensitivity of the information that is being shared, whether that information be personal stories or against an attending individual's beliefs. One weakness that presentations have as a method of delivering information to groups is that they can become quite monotonous. Such an exercise would also provide individuals with the opportunity to better understand the reality that other people may face.

I was interested in introducing the concept of community connectedness to Bowling Green State University students and members of the larger Bowling Green, Ohio community. To adequately introduce this concept, I developed and executed a two-hour event that I called "LGBT* Community Connection" in which students, faculty, and members of the Bowling Green community were invited to attend. The information presented through a PowerPoint at the event was entirely based on the literature review, but was not nearly as in-depth as the literature review.

The presentation based educational model allowed for flexibility of the event, which I found important with fewer attendees than I had expected. I was able to modify the two hours by having discussions on more convoluted topics, such as delving into the specifics of the mental health impacts community connectedness has on individuals. However, it was important that I still maintained clarity, specificity, and conciseness when modifying the event.

when discussion strayed from concise specifics to convoluted topics requiring further clarification. To avoid monotony caused by discussion and information presentation, I created an activity which helped attendees understand how community connectedness develops through a scenario-based approach.

Before and after the event, it was important to carry out a survey to determine the effectiveness of the event. For “LGBT* Community Connection,” the pre- and post-survey determined the effectiveness of the educational components, specifically the overall understanding of community connectedness and the LGBT* community before and after attending the event.

Event Details

Having determined how I wanted to run my event, I quickly felt the need to plan the details of the event, including advertising and determining a keynote speaker. My initial contact for a keynote speaker for my “LGBT* Community Connection” event was Elijah Johnson, a Bowling Green State University social work graduate and past president of VISION, the LGBT* student organization. Eli codetermined the date of the event with me by determining which day they were free in the spring semester, which ended up being March 18th. It was at this point that I also decided that I would present a PowerPoint presentation with possible discussions interspersed, depending on attendance, and an activity to engage attendees and improve their understanding of the topic.

With the date determined and a guest speaker planned, I cooperated with Bowling Green State University’s Conference and Event Planning Services and Classroom Technology Services to find a room to hold my event and determine what technology I would have available to me in

that room. As a student using a classroom, I did not have to pay any cover fees, which meant I did not need to run a fundraiser as I initially thought. Unfortunately, university policies created challenges for me when it came to advertising for my event.

I quickly found it difficult to advertise my event through flyers or on-campus news outlets. Without having a sponsoring student organization or university department, I was only able to post flyers on two billboards throughout campus, and only through Bowling Green State University's campus update. Therefore, I primarily advertised my event through word of mouth and asking other members of my fraternity to take flyers to their other organizations and friends to hand out. I also reached out to the LGBT* sorority at BGSU, Gamma Rho Lambda, the LGBT* student organization, VISION (no one knows what the acronym actually stands for anymore), and To Write Love On Her Arms, the student organization for the prevention of student suicide. Secondly, I created a Facebook event and invited all people in my contacts who I thought may have an interest in attending. Finally, had the weather been better, I would have used chalk on the sidewalks as a method of advertisement, as this would not have broken any university policies, but the sidewalks were too wet to use chalk.

On the day of the event, I had prepared a PowerPoint presentation which included discussion topics, an activity, and pre- and post-surveys to determine the effectiveness of my event. I also had nametag materials available for attendees, including pink dots if they were not comfortable having their picture taken, which was explained on a slide upon their entry to the event and verbally to them before starting. They were free to get the pink dots at any time.

My primary goal for the event was to determine if Bowling Green State University students, faculty, and members of the Bowling Green community had prior knowledge of the concept of community connectedness as applied to the LGBT* community. Secondly, I

wanted to determine the effectiveness of my event in introducing the topic to people who do not have prior knowledge of the concept of community connectedness as applied to the LGBT* community.

To achieve these goals, I had planned to discuss the basics of what LGBT* stands for, the development of community connectedness through community interaction and community involvement, and the positive and negative impacts that connectedness with the LGBT* community may have on LGBT* individuals as discussed in my literature review. However, the day of the event brought several surprises, one of which was low attendance. I modified my event to be more discussion based which allowed attendees to better apply the information to their personal experiences with communities. During discussion, attendees found they could apply the topics of community interaction, community involvement, and community connectedness to their own communities, such as student organizations, extracurricular activity groups, and even friend groups. Discussion became much more open with the small group, meaning that people were more willing to share their personal experiences with various communities and in developing their connectedness with such communities. This allowed them to directly relate the information from the event to their own communities and lives.

Besides low attendance, the day of the event also brought varying levels of understanding how community connectedness specifically impacts the LGBT* community, as demonstrated by the pre-survey. This created a challenge for me because there were attendees with very limited knowledge on the LGBT* community and attendees with extensive knowledge of not only the LGBT* community, but also of community connectedness. Between the small group and the dichotomy in knowledge-base, it was important for me to do near-constant interest checks to ensure all attendees are adequately engaged in the presentation and discussions.

The activity, however, was the best facilitator when it came to guiding attendees' understanding of the process of developing a connection to a community. It was a simple, three station event of two levels with the goal being to become involved with the LGBT* community by getting at least two colored dots. To earn dots, participants went to either the "home" or "extracurricular" stations where they chose a number between one and seven. The numbers correlated to a scenario that could give them one or two dots, which symbolized a positive initial community interaction, or no dots, which symbolized a negative initial community interaction. Some participants chose numbers correlating to positive community interactions, which quickly involved them in the community, while others experienced multiple negative community interactions or never had the opportunity to become involved in the community. The second level and third station was the "community involvement" station, but participants who had two or more dots did not have to visit the third station – this is much like how community involvement is an active choice in the development of community connectedness, whereas community interaction may not be voluntary, as demonstrated in the scenarios. The thoughtful, post-activity discussion led to the determination that although it was unfortunate when a participant was unable to reach the third station, such unfortunate occurrences happen in life as well. This further allowed LGBT* individuals the opportunity to share their own experiences with initial community participation and community involvement if they so wanted.

After the event's closure, I had a post-survey for attendees to complete. One of the responses to the question of "What did you like least about the event?" was that I tended to use "you guys" frequently. Unfortunately, this demonstrates the struggle I faced during the event to maintain inclusive and sensitive, non-binary terminology. I attempted to use "you all" as much as I could, but unfortunately "you guys" is a habitual phrase that I am still struggling to dissolve.

Survey Results

The pre- and post- surveys are both anonymous, voluntary, self-report surveys. The pre-survey consisted of the following questions meant to gauge attendees' prior knowledge based on a scale of 1-4 with 1 being not at all, 2 being somewhat, 3 being mostly, and 4 being completely:

1. How much do you understand the concept of “community” when applied to the LGBT* population?
2. How much do you think “feeling connected” impacts individual people who identify as LGBT*?

The third question was an open-ended question asking attendees to:

3. Briefly write what you are hoping to learn from this experience.

The final question of the pre-survey is used to determine effective methods of advertisement, listing the methods that I used to the best of my capabilities (e.g. campus update, university organizations, friends, flyer, or a write-in option of other):

4. How did you hear about this event?

Of the 11 attendees, 9 completed the pre-survey. The results for each question are as follows:

Question 1: How much do you understand the concept of “community” when applied to the LGBT* population?

With a response of 1, not at all:	1
With a response of 2, somewhat:	4
With a response of 3, mostly:	3
With a response of 4, completely:	1

Question 2: How much do you think “feeling connected” impacts individual people who identify as LGBT*?

With a response of 1, not at all:	0
With a response of 2, somewhat:	0
With a response of 3, mostly:	4
With a response of 4, completely:	5

Question 3 as based on emerging themes (Note: there may be more than 9 responses as some people had responses that fit multiple themes): Briefly write what you are hoping to learn from this experience.

Theme 1 – No response:	1
Theme 2 – Learn more information regarding the LGBT* community:	5
Theme 3 – How to become connected to the LGBT* community:	1
Theme 4 – The impact of connectedness on mental health:	1
Theme 5 – Develop a new perspective:	2

Question 4 (Note: there may be more than 9 responses as people could respond to multiple answers): How did you hear about this event?

Campus Update:	0
University Organization:	0
Friends:	9
Flyers:	0
Other:	1 (Facebook event)

The post-survey consisted of the following questions meant to gauge attendees understanding after the event on a scale of 1-4 with 1 being not at all, 2 being somewhat, 3 being mostly, and 4 being completely:

1. How much do you understand the concept of “community” when applied to the LGBT* population?
2. How much do you think “feeling connected” impacts individual people who identify as LGBT*?

The third and fourth questions were open-ended response questions used to determine the most helpful and least helpful aspects of the event:

3. What did you like most about the event?
4. What did you like least about the event?

The fifth question was an open-ended response question that allowed attendees to comment what specifically they learned from their attendance at the event:

5. Briefly write something new that you learned about the LGBT* community.

Of the 11 attendees, 10 completed the post-survey. The results for each question are as follows:

Question 1: How much do you understand the concept of “community” when applied to the LGBT* population?

With a response of 1, not at all:	0
With a response of 2, somewhat:	0
With a response of 3, mostly:	1
With a response of 4, completely:	9

Question 2: How much do you think “feeling connected” impacts individual people who identify as LGBT*?

With a response of 1, not at all:	0
With a response of 2, somewhat:	1
With a response of 3, mostly:	2
With a response of 4, completely:	7

Question 3, as based on emerging themes (Note: there may be more than 10 responses as some people had responses that fit into multiple themes): What did you like most about the event?

Theme 1 – The activity:	6
Theme 2 – The discussion:	2
Theme 3 – The information presented:	4
Theme 4 – The guest speaker:	1
Theme 5 – The PowerPoint presentation:	1
Theme 6 – The presentation’s overall professionalism:	1

Question 4, as based on emerging themes (Note: there may be more than 10 responses as some people had responses that fit into multiple themes): What did you like least about the event?

Theme 1 – No response:	4
Theme 2 – Exclusive terminology slips:	1
Theme 3 – The activity:	1
Theme 4 – Hungry with no food available:	1
Theme 5 – Too much detail:	2

Theme 6 – Late start: 1

Question 5, as based on emerging themes (Note: there may be more than 10 responses as some people had responses that fit into multiple themes): Briefly write something new that you learned about the LGBT* community.

Theme 1 – The individual’s choice to associate with a community: 2

Theme 2 – Many definitions of community: 2

Theme 3 – Current identity terminology: 2

Theme 4 – Negative impacts connectedness may have on the community: 4

Theme 5 – Positive impacts connectedness may have on the community: 2

Theme 6 – The development of community involvement: 1

Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate advertisement failure, event success, and how the event may be improved in the future. According to the 9 people who completed the pre-survey, student organizations and campus advertising was unsuccessful. However, reaching out to friends and asking for them to advertise my event through word of mouth seemed to work far better.

Secondly, the pre- and post-surveys, as seen by questions number one and two on both, show an increased understanding of community connectedness in regards to the LGBT* community.

Furthermore, it is clear that the information presented was in line with my literature review, according to the post-survey. Such results show that even if attendance was low, the event was successful overall as it completed its objective of being educational for attendees. Thirdly, the post-survey allowed for attendees to provide feedback on how I can improve the event for the future if the event is run again.

Appendix

Community Interaction: Although Frost and Meyer (2012) describe the specific actions that people take or events that people partake in as “community participation,” I felt “participation” made a few assumptions of the actions or events. First, “participation” often implies voluntary action, which is not necessarily the case for individuals who had not planned on attending a certain event or speaking with a certain person. Second, it implies that the action or event is continual or repetitive. However, for many individuals identifying as LGBT*, it may be difficult to continue speaking with a knowledgeable person or attend an event again due to other life factors. The term “interaction,” however, has an implication that both parties have an impact, whether that impact is positive is not implied. Furthermore, “interaction” is typically used for one-time events or actions between people, but sometimes can be continual or repetitive. Essentially, such determination in terminology comes down to the very small nuances of diction that is arguably unnecessary, but still important enough for me to change.

Coping Mechanisms: Behaviors or actions that individuals do to handle problems or issues that arise in their lives (e.g. completing coloring books when feeling anxious). However, it should be noted that not all coping mechanisms are healthy (e.g. alcohol, drugs, and sex).

Gay Bar: A bar or club in which LGBT* members are openly accepted and protected.

Intersecting Identity: An individual’s identity that is formed by overlapping identities, especially in terms of minority identities (e.g. a black LGBT* individual).

Person-in-Environment Perspective: A social work principal that explains the importance of understanding an individual’s behaviors in terms of the interactions between the person and their environment.

Rumination: A psychological term referring to a person focusing solely on the symptoms with which they are experiencing, which tends to have a negative impact on a person's overall mental health.

Strengths-Based Practice: A social work principal that explains the importance of understanding an individual's strengths as the foundation with which to build positive behaviors.

Umbrella Identity: An identity which acts as a catch-all for multiple other identities (e.g. asexual acts as an umbrella identity for other sexualities such as demisexual and graysexual).