Sexual Assault in LGBTQ+ Communities

Definitions & Terminology

Lesbian
A woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay
A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Bisexual
A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Transgender
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Queer
A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with "LGBT."

Cisgender
A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.

Gender identity
The term "gender identity," distinct from the term "sexual orientation," refers to a person's innate, deeply felt psychological identification as a man, woman or some other gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned to them at birth (e.g., the sex listed on their birth certificate). For example, one can be assigned to the gender of a female, but personally identify as a man. Another example is that one can be assigned to the gender of a male, but personally identify as neither a man nor woman. Gender identity is non-binary, which means that like sexual orientation, gender is also on a spectrum.
**Non-binary**
Refers to gender identities that are not solely or exclusively masculine or feminine. This is sometimes referred to as gender queer.

**Gender expression**
Gender expression refers to all of the external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions. Social or cultural norms can vary widely and some characteristics that may be accepted as masculine, feminine or neutral in one culture may not be assessed similarly in another.

**Gender non-conforming**
A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

*Terms adapted from the Human Rights Campaign*
General Statistics

The CDC’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010) found for LGB people:

**Lifetime Prevalence of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay: 44%</td>
<td>Gay: 26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual: 61%</td>
<td>Bisexual: 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual:</td>
<td>Heterosexual: 29%</td>
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- 22% of bisexual women have been raped by an intimate partner, compared to 9% of heterosexual women
- 40% of gay men and 47% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence other than rape, compared to 21% of heterosexual men

Injustice at Every Turn: Statistics from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey:
- 24% of transgender American Indians, 18% of transgender people who identified as multiracial, 17% of transgender Asians, and 15% of Black transgender respondents experienced sexual assault in K-12 education settings

Sexual Assault of Trans and GNC (gender non-conforming) people due to trans status, Injustice at Every Turn:
- 12% of K-12 students - higher for POC (people of color) and trans girls. Of those, 68% attempted suicide
- 6% at work – higher for undocumented noncitizens (19%)
- 22% at shelter – higher for POC, undocumented, and trans women
- 2% by police officers because they were transgender or gender non-conforming
- 15% in jail or prison

Partner Abuse of Trans and GNC people, Injustice at Every Turn:
- 19% experienced domestic violence because of their trans status
- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of those with children experienced an ex-partner limiting their contact with their children.
- Courts limited or stopped relationships with children for 13% of respondents, with Black, Asian, and multiracial respondents experiencing higher rates of court interference.
- Domestic violence by family member led to 4x homelessness, 4x sex work, 2x HIV, and 2x suicide attempts compared to their peers who did not experience family violence
Challenges & Barriers Specific to LGBTQ+ Community

- Coming out to family, friends, coworkers, etc.
- The implications of coming out in different settings
- Prejudice and discrimination
- Anti-LGBT laws
- Misconceptions about LGBTQ community and individuals
- Hate crimes
- Social stigmas
- Institutional biases & barriers
- Culturally unaware service providers, outreach only to women
- Forensic nurses unfamiliar with transgender and intersex people
- Few knowledgeable therapists
- Lack of research & information
- **Gender dysmorphia**: Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term - which replaces Gender Identity Disorder - "is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

Strategies to Address Challenges

- Using inclusive, neutral, and aware language: lover, significant other, partner, spouse, “you all” “folks” “everyone”
- Using preferred pronouns & names
- Collaborating with LGBTIQ organizations
- Checking one’s own assumptions and biases
- Educating others and ourselves when needed
- Using outside resources and making referrals when needed

Implications for Clinical Practice & Advocacy Roles

- Examining our own biases and beliefs when relating to this population
- Types of questions posed and rationale for posing questions (am I simply curious or do I need to know in order to help individual or provide resources?)
- Ability to provide safe and supportive atmosphere for someone that may not feel safe on a day-to-day basis
- Social advocacy in community and beyond
- Ability to educate family and community (if needed)
- Work with colleagues that may still have strong biases toward LGBTQ community
- Work with individuals that may lack outside social support
Different aspects of someone’s identity interact and influence the way they experience different things, including and especially gender-based violence.

No one identity determines how ALL people with that identity will experience violence. Identities should be thought of in the context of the individual’s experience and reaction to a traumatic event. For example, an international student might be afraid to drop a class or take off time to pursue counseling because of fears about change to visa status. While not all international students will feel that way, it is important to try to understand that each person’s identities create unique barriers, reactions, challenges or experiences.
“Intersectionality” as a term was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. As a concept, it arose from black women’s critiques of the feminist movement and its tendency to ignore the ways in which race came with its own set of oppressions that interacted with gendered ones. Today, intersectionality can broadly be thought of as describing the way social identities or groups impact the way individuals experience discrimination and systems of oppression. In the context of gender-based violence, we think about the ways that various identities shape the way that someone experiences violence, the ways they respond to it, and the various barriers and challenges they face when trying to address it.

Note: Important to consider intersectionality when working with LGBTQ individuals, and that several aspects of their identities may have been oppressed and work together to shape that person’s experiences and background. Each individual is unique and has different experiences, regardless of how they wish to identify.

Resources

- San Diego LGBT Community Center
- Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) San Diego County
- The Parents and Friends of Leadership and Gays (PFLAG)
- Trevor Project
- National Gay & Lesbian Taskforce
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)
- Center for Community Solutions
- Forge
- The Northwest Network
- The Anti-Violence Project

Recommended Readings & Videos

- Beyond the Gender Binary: Yee Won Chong at TEDxRainier: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lm4vxZrAig
- On Intersectionality: Essential Writings, Kimberlé Crenshaw