

Where Do I Belong?: LGBT Student Experiences in On-Campus Housing

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Purpose

This study will seek to help student affairs practitioners identify common student experiences and how they relate to retaining LGBT self-identifying students who live in on-campus housing. By better understanding these experiences and how they relate to campus culture, changes can occur to help better support this population.

Method

Individual one-on-one interviews were conducted with students who lived on campus at least one year and self-identified as LGBT.

Research Questions

Does experiences, experienced within on-campus housing, by students who identify as LGBT impact those students decision to stay in on-campus housing?

#1

Does experiences within on-campus housing contribute to student's overall perception of campus climate at the institution?

#2

"I do this really weird thing where I only like to go to the bathroom at certain times, or I wait if I know that there's someone in there because people are sketchy about it..."

"I was walking home with my boyfriend and we were holding hands walking down Kiefaber, and someone screamed 'Fags!' and threw a full sealed beer can at us, and it hit me in the leg... it really bothered me that right there, less than a block from my house that that would happen."

confusing faith fear unidentifiable
anxiety expectations support
uncertain experience uncomfortable
family anomaly overwhelming neighborhood
friends isolated silent hard

"The hookup culture is huge at this school especially in the heterosexual community so some LGBT students may feel isolated, not in the fact that they want to hook up, but that they don't see there's dating prospects, so they could be discouraged in that sense."

"Just that first time, coming out to that RA at first. It was a very welcoming experience, and I'm sure that the first experience probably makes it or breaks it..."

Findings

Perception of Culture

Study Participants reported feelings of isolation and unease surrounding many aspects of campus culture, particularly the Student Neighborhood. Several Participants referenced "Hook-up Culture".

Coming out at College

While some Participants "came out" prior to entering college, those who went through the process while at the university reported feelings of fear and anxiety of how their peers would react that prolonged their coming out process

Being Gay and Religious

Participant reports were split, half reporting that since coming out they have moved away from religion, while the other half reported that religion was the foundation that helped ease the transition.

Living on Campus

While all participants reported overall positive experiences within on-campus housing, the stories that were shared exhibited feelings of fear, discomfort, and unease when dealing with their peers.

Sources of Support

Participants struggled to name campus resources that were used for support, however after much thought, many participants named individual orgs or their friends as their main source of support.

Implications

Findings from the study showed that LGBT students could be better supported with more intentionality behind physical spaces on campus, as well as campus-wide inclusivity and sensitivity training.