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Full of Pride: Improving Latino Engagement and Retention in USD's LGBT+ Community

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Full of Pride:

Improving Latino Engagement and Retention in

USD's LGBT+ Community

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Abstract

The purpose of my study was to examine and implement strategies that would get gay Latino students at USD to engage more with the LGBT+ community on campus. Using McNiff's action research method, I researched how I can work effectively with USD's LGBT+ community to create a more diverse community that enhances the involvement of Latino students. My findings indicate that Latino students choose to explore their LGBT+ identity through other identity-based organizations and that a stronger need for community building is critical to enhance the involvement of Latino students within the LGBT+ community.

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Introduction

In my professional and personal life, it is important that I make sure everyone feels a sense of belonging in a community. I have always strived for everyone to be inclusive and open-minded to different ideas, perspectives, and lives. If not, it is easy to fall into habits of cliques and segregation that can be detrimental to a college student's experience.

At the University of San Diego (USD), a private Roman Catholic university, it may seem like the campus population might be more close-minded than other large, public universities. USD is primarily known for being affluent and predominantly white, with 49.5% of students identifying as white in fall 2017 (Race/Ethnicity of Fall 2017 Students: Federal Reports, 2018). Growing up in a Catholic household, I know there exists tension between the Catholic and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBT+) communities, which is why I was surprised at how many students identify as LGBT+ at USD. In 2017-2018, USD's largest LGBT+ organization was USD Pride which meets weekly. Starting in Fall 2018, USD opened the LGBT+ & Allies Commons in the Student Life Pavilion (SLP). At USD Pride, there were people in attendance identifying with various gender and sexual identity; however, the majority of those in attendance were white-appearing individuals. USD is a predominantly white institution (PWI) and a religiously affiliated institution (RAI), so many students of marginalized communities can feel that USD is too white and/or too conservative to explore their own identities. Noticeably absent from most of the Pride meetings were Latinos. I hope to see more LGBT+ Latinos engage with the LGBT+ community at USD and explore their own identity. It is important for USD to retain this population so that they can find a community with a sense of belonging.

My research will inform current and future professionals at USD about barriers that LGBT+ Latinos face and how to improve current practices that may discourage them from exploring their identities. So, the purpose of my study was to implement strategies that would engage gay Latinos with USD. I also wanted this research to inform my future work with LGBT+ students. Therefore, my research questions were:

1. To what extent do Latinx students at USD explore their LGBT+ identity at a PWI and RAI?
2. How can I work effectively with USD's LGBT community to create a more diverse community that enhances the engagement of Latino students?

Background

There are cultural barriers that exist which hinder the experience of LGBT+ students of color at religiously affiliated institutions (RAI), specifically for LGBT+ Latinos who must deal with homophobia and heterosexism on campus and at home. Heterosexism is the discrimination or prejudice based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm (Love, 1998). Students may struggle with their sexuality if their campus culture is dominated by heterosexist language. It is important for universities to instill LGBT-inclusive language into their culture such as saying date or partner instead of girlfriend or boyfriend, parent instead of mom or dad, and spouse instead of wife or husband (Weinberg, 2009). The author further highlights the importance of letting students identify themselves so that assumptions are not made. By following Weinberg's recommendations, the University of San Diego (USD), a predominantly white institution (PWI) and RAI, can become stronger allies to the LGBT+ community.

At USD, there was no official center for LGBT+ students until Fall 2018, which did increase the community's visibility on campus. The first LGBT+ student organization at a university was founded at Columbia University in 1969, then known as the Student Homophile League (SHL) (Beemyn, 2003). In 1971, the University of Michigan opened the first LGBT+ resource center in response to a homophobic climate (Fine, 2012). The purpose of an LGBT+ resource center on campus is for members of the community to have a safe space to explore and develop their identity. In their research, Fine (2012) finds that "private universities are significantly less likely to have these spaces" (Fine, 2012, p. 297), which is similar to Getz and Kirkley's (2006) findings. This finding is significant because USD has no LGBT+ center, which can lead to "LGBT students who are not receiving the integral emotional, academic, and community support that could promote their success" (Fine, 2012, p. 298). This can become troubling because often universities that lack LGBT resource centers are those that need them the most (Fine 2012). Without a resource center, LGBT+ Latino men at USD may never find a community to explore and develop their identity. This can further alienate them from the community, instead of increasing their sense of belonging.

Furthermore, LGBT+ students can feel forgotten because student affairs practitioners, faculty, and students don't have the skills or maybe comfort working with this population as opposed to other minority populations (Getz & Kirkley, 2006). Also, some students at RAIs may not feel comfortable coming out during their college years, because they do not feel a sense of belonging in their campus community (Love, 1998). Being an RAI, USD has taken steps to rectify their role in higher education by creating Rainbow Educators (RE), a program whose purpose:

is to build awareness, educate, and engage the USD community around identities such

as sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, and class, while promoting the inclusion and visibility of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) communities (Rainbow Educators, 2018).

Rainbow Educators “create and present workshops at the University of San Diego [to] residence halls, athletic teams, staff and faculty groups, Greek organizations, and student clubs” (Rainbow Educators, 2018). According to Aaron-Albanese (2013), Rainbow Educators has had a positive impact on the campus community, especially now that they have included other elements of diversity into their program. With the impact RE has garnered over the years at USD, visibility of the LGBTQ+ community at USD has increased as seen with USD’s Pride student organization no longer meeting in secret (Getz & Kirkley, 2006).

However, many students of color still lack the resources to explore their sexual identity in a safe space. According to Poynter and Washington (2005), there exists a system within the LGBTQ+ community in which gay, white males have more power, visibility, and opportunities than other LGBTQ+ identifying people, especially those with intersecting identities. The authors state some students of color have found racism to be prevalent in their LGBTQ+ community on campus, which further excludes them. They also find that LGBTQ+ students of color often choose to explore and develop an aspect of their identity one at a time, deeming the other one less important. Rankin’s (2005) research confirms Poynter and Washington’s findings, highlighting that students of color tend to hide their sexual orientation identity. By coming out, some people may be scrutinized by their community or, worse, be cut off financially, which is why people of color struggle with coming out (Rasmussen, 2004; Rhoads, 1997).

Specifically, LGBTQ+ Latino males have a difficult time exploring the intersectionality of their identities. Arturo Vasquez (2012) finds that gay Latino students feel that faculty and staff

do not take an interest in their life, and often do not understand Latino values such as family and traditions. Duran and Perez II (2017) state that Latinos are encouraged at an early age to keep and strengthen family ties, including extended family not just immediate family. Because of the role family has on Latino culture, the authors state that traditional gender roles lead to *machismo*, which is a concept associated with aggressive masculinity. Furthermore, gay Latino men “are less likely to disclose their sexual orientation ... to family members in comparison to their White peers” (Duran & Perez II, 2017, p. 1149).

Pride meetings at USD predominantly consist of white or white-appearing people, which can be problematic because it only gives visibility to white-appearing LGBT+ people. This further excludes students of color from the community and from the conversation. According to Poynter and Washington (2005), for students to explore their intersecting identities, students must have a safe space and open community to have dialogues. In this research, I learned what kind of programs encourage students of color to engage with the LGBT+ community, and how retention of those students affected the campus climate.

Context

My work took place within USD’s LGBT+ community, which consisted of USD Pride and the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons. USD Pride is advised by Dr. Kirkley and holds an executive board consisting of President, Vice President (V.P.) for Community, V.P. for Activism, V.P. for Supreme Drag Superstar, and V.P. for Finance and Marketing. USD Pride now meets weekly in the United Front Multicultural Commons (UFMC), where members can come to relax, socialize, and partake in activities that strengthen their bonds. It is important to note that USD Pride used to meet in the Commuter Commons before the LGBTQ+ & Allies

Commons existed. This space was only available to Pride on Wednesday evenings, since the space is specifically for commuter students at other times.

Because USD is a private, Catholic university, its commons is small compared to other large, public universities, which further decreases their visibility on campus. As a gay Latino, it is important for me to explore the intersectionality of those different identities, which is why I joined the Pride organization as a member. As a member of the organization, I participate in activities and conversations that enhance my knowledge of my sexual identity.

I hoped to work closely with Pride advisor Dr. Evelyn Kirkley and the Pride executive board to brainstorm ideas, and create and implement programs that brought a greater turnout of gay Latinos to meetings and other events hosted by LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons. However, it was difficult and challenging to do research, because I did not participated in every meeting. This could have lead some members to believe that I was an outsider, which can make it difficult to get people to participate in my research and get honest, authentic responses. It was also challenging to get students of color to participate, since they must have some desire or intrigue to explore their identity within LGBT+ or their allyship.

Methodology

To truly create an impact, I used Jean McNiff's model of action research, which highlights the importance of myself being a part of the research. With this method, by placing myself as a participant of my research, I "take responsibility for improving and sustaining [myself], and for trying to influence the development of the world" (McNiff, 2016, p. 24). My insider status helped me "improve the quality of [my] thinking [and] to improve the quality of [my] interactions with others" (McNiff, 2016, p. 9).

This model emphasized the importance of self-reflection, whether it be through journals or logs. I reflected on my own actions as I did this research to understand how I affected the outcomes. By doing this, I allowed myself, my thought processes, and my work to be critiqued. By choosing this model of action research, I am not walking “along a straight path to an end point (as in social science research)” (McNiff, 2016, p. 16). Instead, “it adopts a transformational form, where new questions emerge through the process” (McNiff, 2016, p. 16).

This method of action research was relevant for my research question because of the importance of change within myself and the organization. Because of the emphasis placed on self-reflection, I dug deep into my own assumptions and welcomed challenges. This is important because, as a gay Latino, I cannot assume that my experience is similar to other Latinos’ experiences or other gay men’s experiences. By generalizing, I do a disservice to the population. Another strength of this model is that I got to learn while working with this population. I then applied what I learned from my research in my work.

However, there are some drawbacks with this method. First, I cannot make cause and effect claims because this is such an isolated population. To be able to successfully make a cause and effect claim, my study would have to be completely randomized. Since my participants was not chosen at random, I can only make correlations. The other limitation of this method is how I cannot generalize, since it is a specific population. LGBT+ Latinx students at USD have different experiences than other LGBT+ Latinx students at other universities.

I used qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data. These methods included surveys and 1:1 interviews. I intended to survey both the Pride executive board (E-Board) and LGBT+ Latinx students, and the interviews were only Latino men.

Cycle 1: Survey to PRIDE E-Board and Latinx students

I conducted an online survey to the executive board of PRIDE and Latinx students at USD. This survey was primarily a demographic survey with two questions asking them to define diversity and name a location at USD with the most diversity. This survey was important to the research because it informed me of my participant's current understanding of diversity. It also provided me with data on how Latinx students define diversity and how non-Latinx students define it.

Cycle 2: Individual interviews with Latino men

This cycle was restricted to only LGBT+ Latino men. The individual interviews focused on their unique perspective on their experience so far at USD, and why they chose to join certain organizations.

Since I followed McNiff's model of action research, each cycle consisted of observing, reflecting, and revising. Those were important steps in the cycle because it allowed me to better connect with my participants, and it allowed me to revise my plan based on where the data and conversations are going.

Needs Assessment

During my undergraduate years, I never joined or participated in any events aimed at the LGBT+ community. I had found my own community outside of established clubs or organizations on campus, but I do regret not participating. So, once I started graduate school, I began attending Pride meetings to get to know other students in USD's LGBT+ community. Since it was my first year at USD, it was important for me to find a new community where I was free to further explore and develop my gay identity. I quickly realized that I was one of few Latinos in the room. This did not discourage me from continuing to attend, but I did find myself

struggling to connect with the group because I could not see anyone that looked like me. Based on my experience, I wanted to know why Latinos are not getting involved with Pride.

For me to start developing a research plan, I needed to speak to the Pride advisor, Dr. Evelyn Kirkley, about the problems I have seen in the organization. She and I discussed various issues that Pride has had to deal with, and we both agreed that I should explore this issue more in depth. I also spoke to the Pride president about my research idea. He agreed that, although he has seen improvement in Pride's racial diversity, it is still a work in progress, and he welcomed my effort to do research.

The remarks of the Pride president, however, made me reevaluate my research idea. It also made me wonder if Pride's current methods to improve racial diversity were already effective and if implementing my initiatives would create a different outcome. So, it was important for me to figure out to what extent racial diversity had improved within Pride over the years. It was also crucial to determine if there has ever been a time when plenty of Latinos were involved with Pride, and the kind of programming Pride had that increased its racial diversity.

For my research to be successful, I had to include key members of Pride including the advisor and the executive board. It is important for me to include them because their opinions and thoughts on Latino engagement are crucial to understanding and improving Latino retention. I also planned to recruit Latinx students who identify as LGBT+. I intend to focus on the experiences of Latino students who identify as gay; however, I also wanted to include other LGBT+ Latinx to discuss similarities in their experiences at USD.

Pre-Cycle

The observation portion of the pre-cycle began in the Spring of 2018. At this time, I knew I wanted to work with USD's LGBT community, but I did not know to what extent or what

themes I wanted to explore. I reached out to Dr. Evelyn Kirkley to discuss my Action Research with her. She connected me with the president of Pride, so that I can also ask him any questions or discuss any concerns with him. I tried my best to attend each Pride meeting every Wednesday night, but due to class schedule conflicts, it was difficult to do so. In those few meetings I was able to attend, I quickly noticed those in attendance were younger, and that this catered more toward undergraduate students. There were more students in attendance than I was expecting, though. It was also apparent that there were more female-appearing students than male-appearing. Lastly, those in attendance were also more white-appearing, unsurprisingly. However, just because they were white passing did not necessarily mean they were white. There was a decent number of Latinx students in attendance, mostly female-appearing, though.

It was nice to see that LGBTQ students had a safe space for themselves on campus and have created a strong community. Going in, everyone was smiling, relaxing, and talking with one another. Even a new member like myself felt welcomed quickly by everyone. Since USD is a PWI, it was not surprising to see that many of the students in the Pride organization were white-appearing or passing. I was surprised to see that there were more female-appearing students, because the literature I had researched up to that point had indicated that gay, white men have a more prominent presence in LGBTQ communities. I started wondering why female students may be more inclined to be a part of this organization than men at USD. This led me to also start thinking, more specifically, why female Latinx students engaged with this organization,

At the first Pride meeting I attended, Dr. Kirkley introduced me to the president before the meeting officially began. It was only a quick introduction, so that he can then start the meeting. I waited until after the meeting had concluded to reach out to him. I asked him if he thought that diversity had increased in the years he has been involved with the organization, and

if he knew that diversity was an issue. I also asked him about any collaborations with the Latinx student organizations on campus.

The president was very aware of the issues the Pride organization had and admitted to having discussions with the executive board about them. It seemed that the executive board was making efforts to diversify their organization. However, not having a place for themselves seemed to put them at a disadvantage. Since they were only using the Commuter Commons located in the University Center (UC), it was difficult to attract new students since it was only reserved in the evenings.

Starting in Fall 2018, USD created the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons located in the Student Life Pavilion (SLP) on the 4th floor. This space is located on the same floor as the Women's Commons, United Front Multicultural Commons (UFMC), Black Student Resource Commons, and Graduate & Law Student Commons. The Pride organization now holds their meetings in the UFMC since it is a larger space. The addition of a space for USD's LGBTQ+ community near the UFMC should hopefully increase their diversity and have more Latino students participate in the organization. Because of this new addition, I am no longer focusing only on why gay Latinos do not participate in Pride but rather why they do not participate with the greater LGBTQ community at USD.

Cycle 1

Observe

Cycle 1 officially started at the beginning of the new school year in Fall 2018. Now that a LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons exists at USD, the Pride organization has now moved its meeting space into the SLP as well. However, because of the size of the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons, the Pride organization meetings happen next door in the UFMC. I attended the first meeting and

recognized many of the same faces that would attend the year before. The executive board consists of students from racially diverse backgrounds, however, those doing most of the talking and leading are the white appearing students. Still, there was much more racial diversity than I had ever seen in these meetings. However, by the following meeting I attended, numbers had already dwindled, and the racial makeup was back to mostly white-appearing.

Reflect

Since this was the first meeting of the school year, I was not surprised to see many new faces and much more racial diversity than the couple times I attended the previous year. Students are more open to try new clubs and/or organizations at the beginning of the semester, when their workload is minimal and their schedule is more flexible. New students who identify as gay men who are now attending meetings can be in stage 3 of Cass's Model of Homosexual Identity Formation, where a student "seeks out homosexuals and the homosexual subculture" (Cass, V.C., n.d.). However, it could be intimidating for a student of color to see a white man leading a meeting. Although this student was very open-minded and relatable, it is difficult sometimes to see past the color of someone's skin. It can be difficult for a student to want to be involved when they do not see people who look like themselves represented in leadership roles.

Returning students can be in any of the stages following stage 3. Most students who are attending as returning students may be in stage 4, which is "characterized by continued and increasing contacts with other homosexuals" (Cass, n.d., p.231). Unlike new students attending meetings, a returning gay, male student now "accepts rather than tolerates a homosexual self-image" (Cass, n.d., p. 231). Returning gay, male students have now fully delved into the LGBT+ community at USD by developing strong interpersonal relationships with other LGBT+ students.

Act

As I began introducing myself to new folks in the organization, I started letting them know about my action research. I spoke to some students if they would be interested in participating in my first cycle and complete a survey. The survey was open to any students, graduate or undergraduate, for about the entire month of November.

The survey consisted of 6 questions, 5 of which were demographic and 2 were short answer. The first question asked what year of school they were in. 3 were graduate students, 2 were second years, and 1 was a 4th year. The second question asked if they identified as Latinx. 4 did and 2 did not. The third question asked what their gender identity was. 2 identified as cisgender female, and 4 identified as cisgender male. The fourth question asked what their sexual orientation identity was. 4 identified as gay, 1 as bisexual, and 1 as straight. The final two questions focused on students' understanding of diversity. The fifth question asked "How do you define 'diversity'?" and the sixth question asked "Where in USD do you see the most diversity?".

Evaluate

Although my sample size for the survey was small, I still believe these answers to be good data because of the depth of their answers. It was critical to have participants represented in all academic levels so that this research could be representative of the USD student population. Half of the participants were graduate students, and the other half were undergraduate students.

To these students at USD, the presence of various identities is important for diversity to be realized. These various identities can be social identities like "race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc." which Jenny and Alan both wrote as critical in their understanding of diversity. Specifically, Alan believes that diversity is "the wealth of knowledge that [these] personal identities can bring." The wealth of knowledge that Alan refers to can be empowering

to individuals, especially if they believe that they do not bring any experience that benefits a group or setting. Everyone's identities shape their life experiences and relationships, and everyone can learn from each other. Ricky responded that "diversity is the idea that everyone comes from different backgrounds and aspire to come together to discuss differences in experiences to better society." These experiences and perspectives can improve a community because it increases visibility and discourages homogeneity.

Furthermore, it is important to note that diversity does not just mean meeting a racial quota. Diversity must include various voices from all types of background, not just about the color of one's skin. Equal representation of all voices is crucial to one's understanding of diversity. For example, Cynthia believes that diversity exists in "an environment where people of many backgrounds and experiences are represented and treated in a manner of equity." So, not only is the representation important, but the way this representation is taken up is also important. There needs to be more than just the presence of various perspectives and representation. They need to be respected.

Respect amongst each other is critical for groups and organizations to have diversity. As mentioned, it takes more than just visibility for a setting to qualify as diverse. Ricky claims that they see diversity as "the idea that everyone comes from different backgrounds and aspires to come together to discuss differences in experiences to better society." If lack of respect for those minoritized voices exists, then the aspiration needed that Ricky mentions will also be nonexistent. A major component of respect involves supporting each other. To continue to maintain diversity, support must be had between everyone. Nathaniel states that they view diversity as "an inclusive and supportive community of various identities and differences." Support can exist in various forms, and Ricky believes a form of support can be helping others

“see new perspectives on society while understanding and bettering themselves.” Thus, diversity is a combination of the presence of different social identities, equal representation of these identities, and respect for those identities.

At USD, much of its diversity can be seen at the UFMC. In fact, Jeremy, Cynthia, and Nathaniel named the UFMC as their top location where they see the most diversity on campus. Since the UFMC is the main hub for USD’s multicultural student organizations, it is not surprising to see the UFMC listed as the top place for diversity at USD. Many of the participants’ responses echo this sentiment, as well as add that student groups, clubs, and organizations also foster plenty of diversity. Nathaniel mentions that the student senate has many members that represent the “many clusters of USD’s student population”, and Ricky mentions the growth of “multicultural fraternities/sororities and different cultural events that take place on campus.”

Modify

Since the UFMC is the place the participants saw the most diversity at USD, it was important for me to visit the UFMC. After the survey was completed, I reached out those participants who identify as gay and Latino to also participate in my following cycle.

Cycle 2

Observations & Reflections

Because I work outside of USD, the only times I am available to visit the UFMC are weekday afternoons. As I visited the UFMC, I also made my way into the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons. The Commons were not as active as I imagined them to be, but that is also expected, since I assume most undergraduate students have left campus by then. Still, there were plenty of students chatting with each other, eating food, and, doing homework. It was also at this time that

I introduced myself to several students hoping they can connect me to more students that identify as gay Latinos.

Act

After finding some more undergraduate participants, I reached out to three participants to set up a time for individual interviews, which focused on their identity developments and experiences at USD. The three participants identified as gay Latinos, and one of the participants participated in the first cycle. The following is the list of questions asked to the participants:

1. What do you like about USD?
2. What made you decide to attend USD?
3. Are you involved on campus? If so, with what?
4. Why did you decide to get involved with those clubs, organizations, and programs?
5. What role did your family have in developing your sexual orientation identity?
6. How would you describe your college experience so far given your identities?
7. How has USD affected your Hispanic and/or Latinx identity?
8. How has USD affected your sexual identity?
9. What recommendations would you give USD to increase their awareness of intersectional identities, specifically that of Latinx and LGBT+?

Evaluate

As a PWI, USD has been making efforts to increase its diversity on campus, especially since Latinx students make up 20% of the student population (Race/Ethnicity of Fall 2018 Students: Federal Reports, 2018). Some of the key elements that attracted these three gay Latinos to USD were class sizes, curriculum, and location. Daniel mentioned that “you can just tell that they [USD] care about their appearance, which I don’t mind because it’s nice when you study

outside.” Overall, Latinx students have plenty of options regarding organizations they can join on campus. In fact, my participants have been actively involved with USD with organizations that reflect their salient identities. Nathaniel participated in a lot of first-generation student groups because he was “trying to get adjusted [his] first year.” Meanwhile, Daniel and David chose to become members of MEChA at USD. Daniel’s Latino identity is very important to him and believed that joining MEChA could be “a way to have [his] voice heard” at a PWI. David, though, is not as actively involved as he wished he were with MEChA. David believed that by joining MEChA, it would be “the best way to network at this school.”

As Latinos, these students grew up in a culture dominated by gender roles, and, more prominently, homophobia. Because of the role family has on Latino culture, Duran and Perez II (2017) state that traditional gender roles lead to *machismo*, which is a concept associated with aggressive masculinity. The authors continue highlighting that *machismo* in Latino culture makes “queer Latino men struggle to be accepted by their families” since they are “seen as deviant and abnormal” (Duran & Perez II, 2017, p. 1151). For example, Daniel stated that his mom is supportive but has not told his dad yet, because he “feels that he won’t be as supportive as Mom.” Often, it is the father figure that holds these *machista* characteristics, so it is common to have gay Latinos come out to the women in their family first. Furthermore, David described his experience as an “immense fear of finding out”, which is why he came out as bisexual first. His family was accepting, but they were still confused. It was not until recently that he finally came out as gay to them. Still, his family continues “question [his] sexuality, but nothing hostile.” However, not all Latinx families are as conservative with their cultural values. Nathaniel felt supported by his family and that they have “given [him] leverage to become who [he] aspires to

be.” Still, the initial fear of what their family might think of them haunted the participants. So, the participants’ hesitation to come out does line up with the research presented.

For many students, their college experiences are shaped by their identities. At USD, it is possible that a white student may have a better experience feeling a sense of belonging because they are at a PWI. A student of color may have a tough start to feel like they belong at USD. David admitted to having a “terrible experience, at first” because they struggled to identify themselves. This feeling is common among minoritized students, and often stems from imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is “the idea that you’ve only succeeded due to luck, and not because of your talent or qualifications” (Abrams, 2018). According to Abrams (2018), imposter syndrome expert Valerie Young says that ““The more people who look or sound like you, the more confident you feel. And conversely, the fewer people who look or sound like you, it can and does for many people impact their confidence.”” So, it is not surprising that David did not have the best college experience when he arrived at USD, since he was one of few Latinx students on campus. The confidence of one self that is associated with a positive college experience is echoed in Nathaniel’s response. Nathaniel has now grown confident in his multiple identity by stating that he is now “confident in speaking on behalf of [his] identities” and is “not embarrassed like [he] may have in the past.” So, there may have been a point where Nathaniel shared similar sentiments as David in the past.

Still, USD has helped these students transform themselves in their leadership and activist development. Daniel says “*me siento apoyado aqui*”, which means he feels supported here at USD. Daniel’s support system comes from the activist community that he has found within USD and has given him a greater appreciation for his Latinx identity. Daniel has “participated in a couple DACA protests in San Diego and L.A. County.” Daniel’s Latinx identity development

has been shaped by the current political landscape in America, but also through family influence. Daniel identifies as a second-generation Mexican-American, which means his parents were born and raised in the United States. According to Vasti Torres's research, "Latino students who were second-generation and beyond, with more acculturated parents, found less stress in the collegiate environment as the students' two worlds more smoothly intertwined" (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016, p. 139). Daniel, then, was more prepared and confident with his Latino identity at a PWI. He was not afraid to challenge and be challenged and, ultimately, led to greater growth in his Latino development.

David and Nathaniel had more of a challenge assimilating to their new environment. For example, David feels that he does not "really express that part of [his] identity" and can sometimes feel lost. According to Phinney's model of ethnic identity development, David seems to be in stage 1 where individuals "have not explored feelings and attitudes regarding their own ethnicity" (Patton et al, 2016, p. 135). Because USD is a PWI, it seems that students of color must go out and find their place on campus. USD has plenty of organizations that cater to students of color, but they can be difficult to find amongst a crowd of white folk. David having no interest in expressing his Latinx identity can be holding him back from having a positive college experience. For example, although Nathaniel may have felt embarrassed by his Latinx identity before, he now believes that USD has given him "a voice and a platform to talk about [his] uncomplabilities and upbringing." Following Phinney's model, Nathaniel has successfully accomplished entered stage 3 where he has resolved his identity conflicts and "come to terms with their ethnicity in the sociocultural and historical context" they live in (Patton et al, 2016, p. 136). So, USD has positively impacted Nathaniel's Latino development by providing him the

resources needed to be confident and speak about issue that surround his identity and those identities of other minoritized students.

Surprisingly, USD has had a positive impact on their sexual identity by being provided many resources for their mental, emotional, and physical health. Daniel appreciates that the health center “has been a wealth of knowledge regarding [his] sexual health.” This is important because sexual health awareness is not an issue one would imagine happen at a Catholic institution. David also loves that he has been “able to express more of my sexuality” without taking “an emotional toll” on him. As mentioned before, David initially came out as bisexual so that his family would not be against him. However, after finding “a couple of friends here that helped me, emotionally, I was able to accept being gay.” By coming out as bisexual first, David did not want to let go of the heterosexual identity that society and family had imposed on him. Because of USD, though, he was able to find his network of other LGBT friends and navigate through stages in Cass’s model into stage 4 – acceptance. Overall, USD has had more of a positive impact than negative impact on gay Latinos

Modify

If I were to redo my interviews, I would have liked to add a question about what participants think of USD’s current LGBT+ population. It would have been interesting to see if their responses matched that of the literature stating that gay, white males have larger visibility in the community.

Final Reflections

Based on the data, the participants in this research have found a way to make both sexual orientation identity and racial identity work together. It was difficult at first for various reasons, including family concerns and personal challenges. However, by fully exploring their Latinx

identity, they were also able to successfully explore and develop their gay identity. So, it is important that USD know the importance of intersecting identities and not just focus on one identity at a time. So many students identify as *gay and ...* and that should not go unnoticed.

As a gay Latino, I found myself relating to many of the statements the participants made. Prior to coming out, I was afraid to come out because I did not know how my family would react. So, hearing the participants have similar experiences made me feel like I was not alone in this community. This is why it so important to share experiences if you can, so that others can relate and see themselves in the LGBT+ community. Also, talking about my sexual orientation in a group has always been difficult not because I am ashamed but rather it would feel like I was the sole representative of the LGBT+ community. I have had more opportunities to explore and develop my Latino identity, so it is easier for me to speak up about my experiences as a Latino. Whereas, with my gay identity, I have not had as many opportunities to do so, and I still feel like I have more to explore and develop that identity.

My action research has informed my current work by providing me guidance on working with LGBT+ students. LGBT+ students may be out to fellow classmates, but they may not necessarily be out to their family. Therefore, it is important that I keep in mind that students' personal lives can be affecting their academics and levels of involvement on campus. I also need to do better work recognizing the multiple identities that students hold and not assume they prefer one identity over the other. Often, students can be tokenized for one of their identities, and this can be detrimental to their development. So, as a student affairs professional, I must continue to recognize students for their multiple identities and continue to encourage faculty and staff to do the same.

Limitations

There were many limitations that I faced throughout the year that impacted my research. The biggest one was my lack of presence in USD's LGBTQ+ community. Because of my off-campus work duties, it was difficult to be a part of student life at USD since most programming and events occur during the day. This did not allow me to observe as much as I could have. For example, had I had more opportunities during cycle 2 to visit and observe the UFMC and the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons, I would have been able to understand more why my participants believe that is where they see the most diversity on campus.

Another limitation was my lack of experience with undergraduate students at USD. I did not have access to them like some of my fellow colleagues, which hindered my participant response. Although I was able to have three participants for the individual interviews which I believe was great, I would have like to have more data for my survey. Six responses were not enough to gather the general vibe regarding diversity on campus.

Recommendations

Although not an immediate solution, the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons needs to grow because it currently feels too secluded. Once the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons starts gaining prevalence by offering more programming and events, the commons will start attracting more diverse students.

It will also be important to have a more visible social media presence regarding LGBTQ+ events. Currently, the USD Pride organization (currently in the process of changing names) has a newsletter sent through e-mail that lists many events and dates such as the LGBTQ+ & Allies Discussion Group and LGBTQ+ Womxn of USD. These are social and support group that can benefit many students but only those signed up for the newsletter know about it. Had I never signed up for the Pride newsletters, I would have never known about various support groups that

exist on campus. Some students may not actively find LGBT+ organizations during Alcalá Bazaar, because they may not be ready or comfortable enough to be seen with this community yet. It is important we remember those students who are questioning or in the closet. Providing social media updates on the LGBTQ+ & Allies Commons Instagram page regarding those events and groups can help students who are in the closet and/or questioning explore their identity.

Continuing to collaborate with Latinx organizations is also important, so that queer Latinx students can have opportunities to explore and develop their intersecting identities at the same time. For example, collaborating with MEChA or any other Latinx associated organization to create a panel of Latinx individuals whose identity as LGBT+ can help increase visibility. Also, including more LGBT-related issues into the undergraduate curriculum could benefit those students who are struggling to identify themselves. This way, students who are questioning or in the closet can have a place to learn more about the community without outing themselves before being ready.

Conclusion

Over the course of this research, I have learned how much the gay Latino students who participated in my research value both their sexual and racial identity. USD has given these Latino students plenty of opportunities and platforms to explore both of their identities, without having them feel that they are sacrificing or prefer one identity over the other. Of course, their family's role in allowing them to feel this way in college cannot be understated. Although not all the participants' family responded with initial support, they are all now in a comfortable place with their family that is enough to get them to feel appreciated on campus and off campus. It is important to remember that this research is only the experience of these few students, and it still is very possible that other gay Latino students at USD do not have similar experiences. So, as

long as efforts continue to be made to become more diverse and inclusive, I hope that more gay Latino students will feel comfortable exploring, developing, and sharing their experiences.

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Appendix A

Survey

*This survey will be sent out to LGBT+ Latinx students AND to other members of USD PRIDE.

Please answer every question as truthfully as possible.

Age/Year in School: _____

Are you of Hispanic and/or Latino origin?

Gender: _____

How do you define your sexual identity?

How do you define diversity?

Where in USD do you see the most diversity?

Appendix B

Interview

- These one on one interviews will only involve LGBT+ male students who also identify as Latino and/or Hispanic.
1. What made you decide to attend USD?
 2. Are you involved on campus? If so, in what ways? If not, can you tell me why?
 3. Why did you decide to get involved with those clubs, organizations, programs?
 4. What does “sense of belonging” mean to you?
 5. What roles, if any, did people at USD, or USD in general, have in developing your sexual orientation identity?
 6. What role has your family had in developing your sexual orientation identity?
 7. How would you describe your college experience so far given your identities?
 8. What recommendations would you give USD Pride to increase their racial diversity?

Appendix C

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board
Research Participant Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:

Full of Pride: Increasing Latino Engagement and Retention in USD's LGBT+ Organization

I. Purpose of this Research Study

My name is Miguel Rios, and I am a graduate student at USD in the Higher Education Leadership program. The purpose of my study is to implement strategies to increase the retention of gay Latinos participating in the USD Pride organization. I anticipate this research will help me understand how to engage this population within Pride and design methods to address retention issues. A further purpose is to improve my professional practice working within the LGBT community.

II. What will you be asked to do?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey online and/or interview. Your participation in this study will take a total of less than one hour.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day:

San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339

University of San Diego Center for Health and Wellness: 619-260-4618

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers better understand how Latino men foster a sense of belonging within the LGBT+ community.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or **password**-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

VI. Compensation

You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to do this and can refuse to answer any question at any time or quit. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will not affect any benefits you are entitled to. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You may contact USD's counseling center anytime at:

Counseling Center

Serra Hall 300
5998 Alcala Park
San Diego, CA 92110
Phone: (619) 260-5655

VIII. **Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Miguel Rios
Email: mrrios@sandiego.edu
Phone: 760-500-2935

Cheryl Getz
Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu
Phone: 619-260-4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Signature of Participant

Date

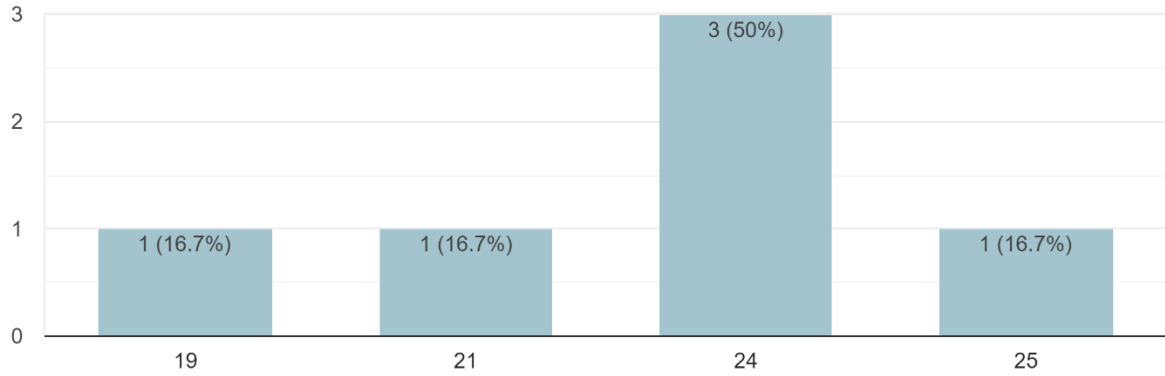
Printed Name of Participant

Appendix D

Survey Responses from Cycle 1

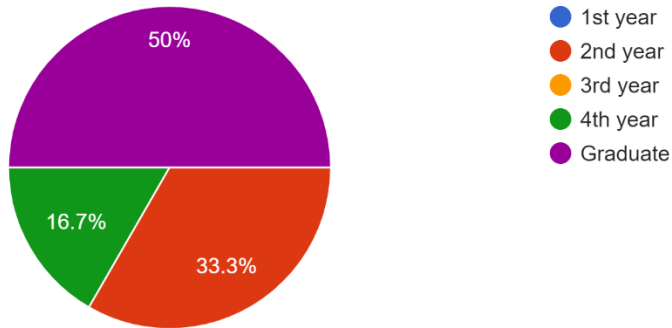
Age?

6 responses



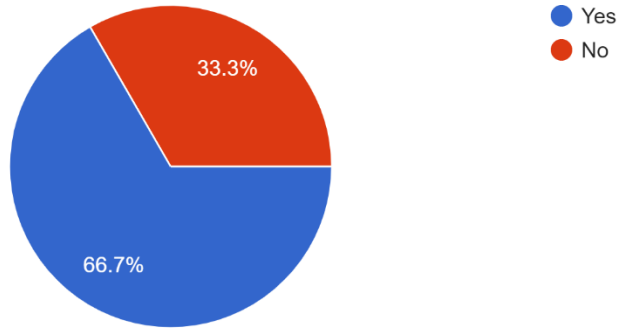
Year in School?

6 responses



Do you identify as Latinx?

6 responses

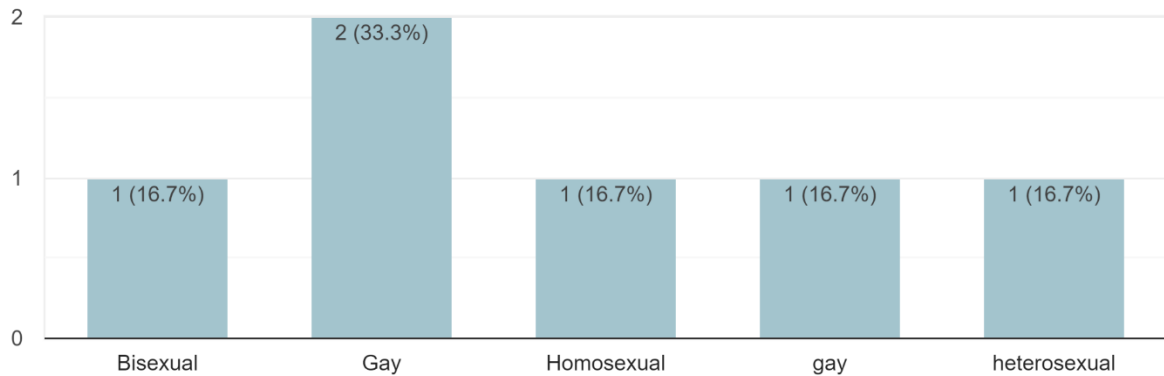


What is your gender identity? 6 responses

- Woman
- Cis-male
- cisgender
- Cisgender Male
- Male
- cisgender male

What is your sexual orientation identity?

6 responses



How do you define diversity? 6 responses

Diversity is the presence of individuals of different identities, and therefore different life experiences, within a literal or figurative area.

An environment where people of many backgrounds and experiences are represented and treated in a manner of equity

various perspectives; various representation among race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc.

In a literal sense, I define diversity as a group or community with various differences. Through a hopeful lens, I view diversity as an inclusive and supportive community of various identities and differences.

To me diversity is the the idea that everyone come from different backgrounds and aspire to come together to discuss differences in experiences to better society and to help others see new perspectives on society while understanding and bettering themselves.

For me diversity is not only about the color of your skin but the wealth of knowledge that personal identities can bring. Sexual Orientation, gender identity, religion are all important aspects of diversity.

Where in USD do you see the most diversity?⁶ responses

Within the UFMC and their orgs

The UFMC (SLP 418)

food courts

I have seen the most diversity at the Student Life Pavilion at USD. Especially working at the 3rd floor of the SLP with Associated Students, I have the pleasure to work with a diverse Senate whose members represent many clusters of USD's student population. Additionally, many departments situated in the SLP (now known as the Commons) work and support many students from various backgrounds and identities; examples include: LGBTQ+ Commons, Women's Commons, United Front Multicultural Commons, Black Student Resource Commons, Graduate and Law Student Life Commons, etc.

I see it mostly in my classes as a graduate student I see it in classes where i have a variety of identities but also different programs. I think people focus on diversity being visual and forget about the other stuff like major and so for me being a graduate student with students from different programs is a way to diversify the class and also where I see diversity the most.

I see it in the efforts that different students make to shed light on the issues that marginalized identities face. This is done through efforts to establish multicultural fraternities/sororities and different cultural events that take place on campus. Since USD is a PWI I think many of the events serve to educate students.