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LGBTQ Training for Aquatic Employees: Impact on Attitudes and Professional Competencies

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of a LGBTQ diversity training on the attitudes and professional competencies of aquatic employees within a campus recreational sports setting. While diversity training is often discussed as a key component of inclusive aquatic programming, little empirical research examining the outcomes associated with such trainings exists. As such, members of the research team developed, implemented, and evaluated a four-month long training program consisting of one in-person training session and monthly inclusion handouts discussing issues related to the inclusion of LGBTQ participants. A comparative quantitative research design was used to measure employee's attitudes towards the LGBTQ population and inclusive-recreational sports aquatic professional competencies for both individuals who underwent the training and a control group of employees who did not participate in the training. Results indicate initial support for this training initiative with those who attended the training scoring higher on average in both attitudinal and competency-based measures.

Keywords: LGBTQ, diversity, training, attitudes, homonegativity, competencies

Introduction/Background

This study addressed the impact of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ)¹ diversity training and education on the attitudes and professional competencies of campus recreation aquatic employees related to LGBTQ participants. In particular, it sought to explore the attitudes and competencies of collegiate aquatic employees through the development of a survey inventory tool that was administered in conjunction with targeted LGBTQ diversity training and diversity-related materials.

The aquatic environment within the collegiate recreation setting has long been recognized as one in which participants from a variety of diverse demographic backgrounds may be able to come together to participate, but this has not been true for all students. Historically, LGBTQ students on college campuses have suffered from harassment in greater numbers than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Rankin, 2004; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010; Scourfield, Roen & McDermott, 2008). This has been acutely true within sporting environments at both the intercollegiate (Rankin, et al., 2011) and recreational sporting levels (Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Mowatt, 2013; Daly, Foster, Keen, & Patchett, 2015). Additionally, aquatic settings in particular have been plagued with a historical lack of diversity and inclusion, particularly when it comes to issues of race (USA Swimming, 2016; Waller & Bemiller, 2018; Waller & Norwood, 2011).

Administratively, aquatic managers on college campuses have attempted to decrease the possible reluctance of LGBTQ persons to participate in programming

and improve the climate of recreational sport spaces through staff diversity training. However, recent research has indicated that many campus recreation departments do not feel they have enough time to offer diversity related training initiatives, and in many cases, lack the information and/or expertise to do so (Kaltenbaugh, Parsons, Brubaker, Bonadio, & Locust, 2017). Even when “diversity training” takes place, departments often lack training specific to the LGBTQ community and participants (Patchett & Foster, 2015). Aquatic managers in particular were found to express laissez-faire attitudes towards promoting LGBTQ inclusion (Anderson, Knee, Ramos, & Quash, 2018). Research has recommended that, “practitioners engage in customer service trainings that go beyond the basics. Advanced topics of bystander intervention, inclusive language, conflict resolution, and campus resources will further empower staff to respond to concerns from LGBT(Q) patrons” (Daly, Foster, Keen, & Patchett, 2015, p. 5).

While the implementation of diversity education programs and further training on the professional skills to respond to the needs of LGBTQ participants is a necessary step, there is little empirical evidence of the *impact* of such programs on the attitudes and competencies of employees within campus aquatic settings. As campus aquatic professionals across the country look for resources to better equip their employees to work with LGBTQ populations on college campuses, it is necessary to explore the efficacy of diversity training programs directed specifically at LGBTQ attitudes and professional competencies. Such evidence can provide concrete training program materials and templates that could have a tremendous impact on the way that such diversity trainings are delivered in collegiate aquatic departments across the country.

While many universities strive to promote inclusion and visibility for LGBTQ students, research has demonstrated that LGBTQ persons face continued discrimination within the higher education setting (Atteberry-Ash, Woodford & Center, 2017; Brown, et al., 2004; Dugan, Kusul, & Simounet, 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Woodford, Joslin, Pitcher, & Renn, 2017; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). For example, Rankin et al. (2010) found that despite institutional improvements to campus climates towards LGBTQ individuals, discrimination is commonplace. Such discrimination includes social exclusion, name calling, micro-aggression, graffiti, and physical abuse. This is particularly true for transgender and gender non-conforming students (Dugan, Kusul, & Simounet, 2012; Rankin, et al., 2010; Woodford, et al., 2017). Such discrimination is linked to negative social, psychological, and physical outcomes for LGBTQ students (Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015). As such, LGBTQ students are often less engaged with their campuses and less likely to participate in co-curricular activities than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

There exists a gap in the recognition of LGBTQ discrimination in the college setting between LGBTQ individuals and heterosexual and cisgender individuals. LGBTQ students are much more likely to report anti-LGBTQ experiences and a negative campus climate than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Brown, et al., 2004; Yost & Gilmore, 2011). For example, one study found that 100% of LGBTQ respondents reported that anti-LGBTQ attitudes exist to some extent on their campus compared to 74% of non-LGBTQ individuals (Brown et al., 2004). Furthermore, 47% of LGBTQ individuals reported that such attitudes exist to a great extent compared to 24% of non-LGBTQ individuals (Brown et al., 2004). While research demonstrates that support for LGBTQ inclusive policies are higher among college students than the general population, large portions of students report neutral or negative views towards such policies (Atteberry-Ash, Woodford, & Center, 2017; Woodford, Atteberry, Derr, & Howell, 2013). According to Atteberry-Ash et al. (2017), while this certainly represents the continued existence of anti-LGBTQ beliefs among segments of the collegiate population, it is also plausible that many hold neutral views towards LGBTQ inclusive policies due to a lack of understanding about LGBTQ discrimination and needs. Thus, educational campaigns may help reduce such apathy.

Physical activity, including aquatic-based activity, has been shown to moderate negative physical and psychological outcomes associated with anti-LGBTQ discrimination (Woodford et al., 2015). Aquatic programming within campus recreational sports is one potential space for LGBTQ individuals to experience such benefits. While research on LGBTQ aquatic participation is extremely limited, studies show that LGBTQ individuals often face discrimination, uncertainty, and constraints to participation in campus recreational sport offerings (Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Mowatt, 2013; Daly, Foster, Keen, & Patchett, 2015; Patchett & Foster, 2015). This is acutely true in aquatic programming for transgender and gender nonconforming students who face uncertainty with organizational policies, gender exclusive facility spaces, and programs (Patchett & Foster, 2015). Heterosexist and homophobic attitudes among recreational sports participants also have the potential to contribute to LGBTQ constraints to participation (Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Mowatt, 2013).

To combat such constraints, campus recreational sport aquatic departments continue to emphasize LGBTQ-inclusive policies, practices, and education. However, research shows that many organizations lack the appropriate resources and expertise to effectively promote LGBTQ-positive environments (Patchett & Foster, 2015). This is most clearly reflected in employee training initiatives (Kaltenbaugh, et al., 2017; Kaltenbaugh, Parsons, Brubaker, Bonadio, & Locust, 2014). Kaltenbaugh and colleagues' (2014) survey of 105 campus recreation departments found a clear disconnect between the recognized value of

diversity/multicultural training and the delivery of such programs. While 93% of institutions agreed that campus recreation is committed to general diversity awareness, only 44% of institutions implemented such training programs. A follow-up to this study found that time, limited staff, and limited expertise particularly impacted a campus recreation department's ability to offer effective diversity/multicultural training (Kaltenbaugh, et al., 2017). In cases where diversity trainings *are* offered, many lack content relating to the LGBTQ community. This is particularly true for transgender and gender nonconforming participants, a population largely ignored in policy and training initiatives (Patchett & Foster, 2015).

Inadequate diversity initiatives can lead to discrimination against both LGBTQ recreational aquatic participants and LGBTQ recreational aquatic employees. Research shows that effective diversity training and active diversity management contributes to the well-being of LGBTQ employees and reduces instances of anti-LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace (Lloren & Parini, 2016). In fact, Lloren & Parini (2016) found that such initiatives are much more influential than LGBTQ-inclusive policies alone. Taken together, LGBTQ-inclusive policies and educational initiatives have a transformative potential for overcoming the heterosexist norms that inhibit full LGBTQ participation in the campus aquatic setting (Atteberry-Ash, Woodford, & Center, 2017).

While LGBTQ-inclusive diversity training is essential to promoting a healthy work environment for LGBTQ employees (Cunningham, 2015a; Lloren & Parini, 2016), their impact on improving employee competencies and attitudes towards the LGBTQ population remains unclear. While limited research has demonstrated positive outcomes from LGBTQ diversity trainings in health-care settings (Porter & Krinsky, 2014), such benefits in a recreational aquatic setting are not known. Research in professional and intercollegiate athletics has described LGBTQ-inclusive organizations as more effective and “agents of social change” (Cunningham, 2015b; Cunningham & Melton, 2011); however less is known about similar outcomes in recreational aquatic settings. Cunningham (2015a) argues that diversity education is one essential antecedent to promoting an LGBTQ-inclusive sport setting. However, data on actual outcomes from such diversity trainings is lacking and the benefits associated remain largely anecdotal. Providing empirical data on the efficacy of LGBTQ diversity training can both solidify an effective training template with measurable outcomes and can provide the evidence necessary for more campus recreation aquatic departments to feel equipped and competent to provide such trainings to their staff.

Finally, aforementioned diversity trainings have largely been geared towards and provided to professional staff within organizations. Many positions

within campus recreational aquatic departments are filled by student staff who, in turn, interact more with participants on a daily basis than many professional staff members (Mull, Bayless & Jamieson, 2005). Thus, it is important that training initiatives be directed to student staff in addition to professional staff, and that outcomes be empirically tested for each group.

This study focused on the impact that LGBTQ-specific training and educational materials had on employees in a recreational collegiate aquatic setting. The study addressed this impact through investigation of attitudinal and professional competency changes that may have occurred as a result of these interventions with aquatic employees at an aggregate level without accounting for other demographic factors.

Method

Participants

Participants in the study included all professional and student staff who served as employees within a campus recreational aquatic department at a major Midwestern university (N=90). The aquatic staff in its entirety was invited to participate in an LGBTQ diversity-related training session during regularly scheduled in-service meetings. This training was based on the nationally-recognized Safe Zone Project training materials, with content that was tailored toward issues and scenarios common within campus recreational sporting environments (The Safe Zone Project, n.d.). Additionally, all employees received a series of four monthly handouts outlining issues related to LGBTQ inclusion, delivered by the research team to their supervisors for distribution. In total, approximately 90 staff members were invited to participate in the training.

Following the administration of the training session, and distribution of monthly handouts, participants were invited to take a retrospective survey in which they answered questions regarding their attitudes and competencies around LGBTQ participants both prior to and after the educational initiatives. Participation in the survey was optional, however those who completed the survey received a \$10 electronic gift card. In total, 27 participants both attended the training and completed the survey instrument. Additionally, a subset of employees who did not attend the training were invited to participate in the survey as the control group. This resulted in 11 completed surveys. This resulted in a total response rate of approximately 42%. The study was reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Instrumentation

The study employed a retrospective survey that was delivered online via the Qualtrics survey platform. The survey instrument included two major sections: one

aimed at LGBTQ attitudinal measurement and the other directed at recreational sport-specific LGBTQ professional competencies (i.e, management strategies, customer service techniques, etc.). Attitudinal measurement items were taken from the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2003), a scale which has been widely used and has shown acceptable levels of validity and reliability when used with similar collegiate populations. The scale consisted of four sub-sections (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender) each consisting of 12 questions. Respondents were asked to evaluate the statements on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This resulted in sub-scale scores that ranged from a minimum of 12 (non-homophobic) to 60 (highly homophobic).

Professional competencies were measured through the development of recreational sport specific items based on competencies put forward by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) related to collegiate recreation (CAS, 2017). This section consisted of 16 questions aimed at measuring the confidence level of respondents toward their ability to engage in professional skills around LGBTQ inclusion. Respondents were asked to evaluate the statements on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all Confident) to 5 (Completely Confident). Demographic information collected included: age, race, gender identity, sexual identity, years of employment, grade level (student staff), and employee status (professional or student staff).

Data Analysis

Internal consistency of each survey subsection was determined using Cronbach's alpha (α) with a 95% confidence interval. Where subsections showed good internal consistency (> 0.8) the within subject's mean scores were used in subsequent analyses. Prior to analyses, all data was checked for outliers and normality by visual inspection of histograms and quantile-quantile plots. Additionally, normality was evaluated by using the Shapiro-Wilk test. If all assumptions necessary for Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) testing were met, subject's mean scores between the training group and control group were evaluated for differences in aggregate LGBT Attitudinal Score and professional competency confidence scores. All statistical analyses were completed using SPSS 24. Statistical significance was set at alpha equal to 0.05.

Results

All survey subsections demonstrated excellent internal consistency (gay men subsection: $\alpha = 0.92$, 95% CI 0.88 to 0.96; lesbian women subsection: $\alpha = 0.96$, 95% CI 0.94 to 0.98; bisexual individuals subsection: $\alpha = 0.97$, 95% CI 0.95 to 0.98; transgender individuals subsection: $\alpha = 0.97$, 95% CI 0.96 to 0.98; occupational competency subsection: $\alpha = 0.97$, 95% CI 0.96 to 0.99). Due to the

presence of collinearity, the LGBT attitudinal subsections were aggregated to form one LGBT Attitudinal raw score, while no such issue was present for the professional competency scores. This resulted in an LGBT Attitudinal raw score ranging from 48 (non-homophobic) to 240 (highly homophobic). Data met all other assumptions for appropriate statistical analysis. From these results the subject's mean response over the various subsections of the survey were used in subsequent analyses. Overall mean scores and descriptive statistics are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 represents participant mean scores after attending the LGBTQ diversity training and receiving the monthly handouts, while Table 2 represents the results of the control group.

Table 1

Overall Mean Scores and Descriptive Statistics—Attended Training

Item	n	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
LGBT Attitudinal Score	27	91.07	33.91
Create a non-discriminatory environment for open gender expression	27	3.78	1.09
Foster practices that enhance a sense of culture for LGBTQ participants	27	3.70	1.71
Foster practices that enhance a sense of self-expression for LGBTQ participants	27	3.67	1.14
Foster practices that enhance a sense of heritage for LGBTQ participants	27	3.37	1.15
Create programmatic offerings that are inclusive of the LGBTQ community	27	3.37	1.15
Identify policies that create barriers resulting in inequalities for the LGBTQ community	27	3.74	1.16
Adapt physical structures that impede access to programs for the LGBTQ community	27	3.22	1.16
Adapt physical structures that impede access to services for the LGBTQ community	27	3.18	1.13
Adapt physical structures that impede access to resources for the LGBTQ community	27	3.37	1.21
Advocate for sensitivity to the social justice concerns of the LGBTQ community	27	3.70	1.14
Ensure access to physical spaces for LGBTQ			

participants	27	3.81	1.24
Ensure access to programs for LGBTQ participants	27	3.78	1.21
Ensure access to resources for LGBTQ participants	27	3.74	1.16
Address the needs of the LGBTQ community when establishing programs	27	3.48	1.16
Address the needs of the LGBTQ community when establishing services	27	3.52	1.19
Promote a workplace culture of LGBTQ staff inclusion	27	4.00	1.27

Table 2

Overall Mean Scores and Descriptive Statistics—Control

Item	n	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
LGBT Attitudinal Score	11	119.18	47.77
Create a non-discriminatory environment for open gender expression	11	3.27	1.27
Foster practices that enhance a sense of culture for LGBTQ participants	11	2.82	1.33
Foster practices that enhance a sense of self-expression for LGBTQ participants	11	2.73	1.35
Foster practices that enhance a sense of heritage for LGBTQ participants	11	2.82	1.33
Create programmatic offerings that are inclusive of the LGBTQ community	11	3.09	1.30
Identify policies that create barriers resulting in inequalities for the LGBTQ community	11	2.82	1.25
Adapt physical structures that impede access to programs for the LGBTQ community	11	2.64	1.29
Adapt physical structures that impede access to services for the LGBTQ community	11	2.82	1.25
Adapt physical structures that impede access to resources for the LGBTQ community	11	2.82	1.33

Advocate for sensitivity to the social justice concerns of the LGBTQ community	11	2.82	1.33
Ensure access to physical spaces for LGBTQ participants	11	3.18	1.33
Ensure access to programs for LGBTQ participants	11	3.36	1.43
Ensure access to resources for LGBTQ participants	11	3.27	1.35
Address the needs of the LGBTQ community when establishing programs	11	2.91	1.22
Address the needs of the LGBTQ community when establishing services	11	.91	1.04
Promote a workplace culture of LGBTQ staff inclusion	11	3.09	1.51

ANOVA testing was employed to investigate differences in attitudinal and professional competency scores between the aquatic employees attending the diversity-related training against those that did not (control). Results revealed a significant difference between the training and control group post-training for both the LGBT attitudinal scores and the professional competency scores. These results are displayed in Table 3. Results show that for the aggregate LGBT attitudinal score, the training group displayed significantly lower (less homophobic) scores after training than the control group. Results from the subsection asking about professional competencies showed the training group on average answered significantly higher (more confident) after training than the control group on a number of the competency-related items (see Table 3).

Table 3
Statistically Significant Differences in Attitudes and Competencies

Item	SD	p	η^2	LGBT Attitudinal Score
Attended Training	91.07	33.91	.047	.105
Control	119.18	47.77		
Foster practices that enhance a sense of culture for LGBTQ participants				
Attended Training	3.70	1.17	.049	.103
Control	2.82	1.33		
Foster practices that enhance a sense of				

self-expression for LGBTQ participants				
Attended Training	3.67	1.14	.036	.117
Control	2.73	1.35		
Identify policies that create barriers resulting in inequalities for the LGBTQ community				
Attended Training	3.74	1.16	.037	.116
Control	2.82	1.25		
Advocate for sensitivity to the social justice concerns of the LGBTQ community				
Attended Training	3.70	1.14	.045	.107
Control	2.82	1.33		

Discussion

This study was conducted to empirically analyze the impact that an LGBTQ-diversity training program can have on aquatic staff within a recreational sports environment. The research team developed, implemented, and evaluated the outcomes of a four-month long intervention consisting of one in-person training and four monthly handouts containing topics pertaining to the promotion of LGBTQ-inclusion within the campus recreation setting. The goal of this intervention was to improve awareness of LGBTQ-related issues within the recreational sport aquatic setting. Beyond awareness, this intervention sought to (a) improve employee perceptions of and attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities and (b) provide work-place specific competencies in promoting an inclusive aquatic environment. It was the outcomes of these two core areas that were the focus of this analysis. Indeed, while LGBTQ-inclusive diversity training has been discussed as essential to the promotion of a healthy work environment for these populations (Cunningham, 2015a; Lloren & Parini, 2016), the outcomes of such programs on attitudes and competencies remains unclear, particularly within the aquatic environment.

This training initially consisted of a one-hour interactive training seminar. This included the following sections: (a) group introductions, (b) group norms, (c) core vocabulary and appropriate terminology, (d) the LGBTQ umbrella – queer sexualities and queer genders, (e) an open question and answer period, and (f) aquatic-specific scenarios and discussion. This final section provided opportunities for employees to implement the information learned throughout the training into their contexts as aquatic employees. Example scenarios included locker room access and safety, body visibility, swimwear, and harassment.

Following this initial training, employees received four monthly handouts detailing additional information on a topic related to the LGBTQ population and

recreational aquatic spaces. These topics were selected based on conversations that occurred during the initial in-person training. The topics of these handouts included: (a) harassment and abuse faced by LGBTQ students, (b) pronoun usage, gender diversity, and intersectionality, (c) usage of the term “queer” and the difference between queer sexualities and queer genders, and (d) addressing micro-aggressions and providing additional resources.

All training materials were adapted by the research team from Safe Zone training (The Safe Zone Project, n.d.). The content was adapted to emphasize recreational sport and aquatic training scenarios. The training was pilot tested at a second university before being implemented at the site of this analysis. All three authors acted as training facilitators.

Analysis of this intervention reveals statistically significant positive change in the attitudinal scores of employees who participated in the training intervention and in certain employment competencies. In particular, attitudes towards the LGBT population were significantly improved for those who participated in the intervention. Mean scores from the composite of the subscales from the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2003), found those who participated in the intervention to hold less homophobic attitudes ($M=91.07$, $SD=33.91$) than those in the control group ($M=119.18$, $SD=47.77$). Results from the ANOVA show these differences in attitudes to be statistically significant ($p=.047$).

The improvement of attitudes towards the LGBTQ population is an important component of a successful training program. This is particularly true given the increased likelihood of this population to experience harassment on college campuses, the location of many recreational sport aquatic programs (Rankin, 2004; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010; Scourfield, Roen & McDermott, 2008). Further, while attitudes towards sexual (and to a much lesser extent gender) minorities have generally liberalized in the United States, such progress is not linear or consistent. For example, a Gallup poll (2019) has indicated that the percentage of Americans believing that homosexuality should be illegal has decreased to 23%. However, this same poll indicated that 46% of the population did not believe any new laws were necessary to protect the rights of LGBTQ individuals, a statistic particularly troubling given the continued legally supported discrimination against this population in the United States.

Indeed, similar results have indicated neutral or negative attitudes in athletics towards implementing inclusive policies (Atteberry-Ash, Woodford, & Center, 2017) and limited disposition for inclusive initiatives within aquatic environments (Anderson, Knee, Ramos, & Quash, 2018). The improvement in mean attitudinal scores in this study is promising and indicates support for the

inclusion of training components that address attitudes in an effort to alleviate possible homonegative environments. Methods to do so in this intervention included, individual reflection, group discussion, narratives, and statistics on discriminatory policies and practices in both general society and the recreational sports aquatic environment. This further supports that initiatives to improve attitudes on a macro-level are important, even when focused within micro-environments like the aquatic workplace.

The second component of the LGBTQ-inclusion training centered on recreational sports and aquatic management competencies put forward by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). In particular, employee comfort in implementing these competencies were evaluated using a Likert Scale (5=Completely Confident). Mean scores for each competency were higher for those who participated in the training than the control group. In fact, those who participated in the training had mean competencies above three (the scale's midpoint) on each competency. Conversely, the control group only averaged above a three on six out of the 16 competencies. However, after analysis, four competencies saw statistically significant improvement for those who participated in the training. These included, fostering practices that enhance a sense of culture for LGBTQ participants, fostering practices that enhance a sense of self-expression for LGBTQ participants, identifying policies that create barriers resulting in inequities for the LGBTQ community, and advocating for sensitivity to the social justice concerns of the LGBTQ community. The improved competencies in policy implications/disparities and advocating for the community mirror previous research on outcomes from an LGBTQ training within the healthcare setting (Porter & Krinsky, 2014).

Cultural competence has been suggested as an important component to the implementation of inclusive leisure environments (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). While definitions vary, the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2011) has defined cultural competency as, "a set of skills that allows providers to give culturally appropriate high-quality care to individuals of cultures different from their own" (p. 65). The competencies outlined in this study reflect the awareness and practices that enable an agency to successfully consider the continued marginalization of the LGBTQ community. Indeed the higher average scores in comfort level with these competencies for those who participated in the training are important given previous research indicating the general gaps in knowledge on the LGBTQ community and continued barriers to implementing an LGBTQ-inclusive environment (Anderson, 2017; Anderson, Knee, Ramos, & Quash, 2018; Anderson & Mowatt, 2013; Daly, Foster, Keen, & Patchett, 2015; Patchett & Foster, 2015). These findings provide some support for continued emphasis on practical employment of inclusive competencies within training initiatives. In this

intervention, methods to promote workplace competencies included group discussion of appropriate and inclusive language, discussions on legal implications, policies, and ethics, discussion on existing resources and advocacy, and aquatic-specific LGBTQ case studies.

Limitations

The study was limited by several factors related to methods and levels of measurement. In regard to sampling, data collection was taken at a singular university location with a generally homogenous population. The generalizability to other institutions remains for future study. In addition, the possibility of selection bias existed within this study. While the use of a control group was important for the comparison of potential effects from the training, participants were not randomly assigned to attend the training or be a part of the control group. As such, there is a possibility that those who attended the training hold more accepting beliefs in general than those who did not attend. The sample size for this study was also relatively small. Although the negative impacts of this seemed mitigated by an adequate survey response rate and measures of adequate effect size within the analysis, it should be recognized that a larger sample for future study would be beneficial. Additionally, due to issues of collinearity the L, G, B, and T attitudinal subsections from the survey instrument were aggregated to form one LGBT attitudinal raw score. This limitation should not reflect a conflation of experiences for L, G, B, and T populations.¹ Indeed the experiences of queer genders likely differ from those of queer sexualities within aquatic spaces – including locker room access, swimwear regulations, and visibility. The divergent experiences of these communities warrant further research and consideration in aquatic programs.

Finally, as a result of the organization's information delivery system, some employees in this study potentially may have missed some of the monthly inclusion newsletters distributed throughout the semester. These additional resources were sent to the aquatic managers who were left to distribute these materials to their employees. While anecdotal feedback suggested a high readership of these materials, a quantitative analysis of actual readership remains unknown.

Conclusion & Future Implications

Previous research has indicated the need for more programs geared towards the promotion of an LGBTQ-inclusive aquatics environment (Anderson, Knee, Ramos, & Quash, 2018). However, this research also called for a systematic evaluation of “best practices” in the promotion of inclusion. Diversity training presents one such intervention that has been touted as essential to the promotion of an LGBTQ-inclusive environment (Cunningham, 2015a; Lloren & Parini, 2016), while remaining empirically under-evaluated. As such, this study implemented and evaluated an LGBTQ-inclusive training program with aquatic staff at a large

Midwestern university. Results indicated improved attitudes towards the LGBTQ community post-training when compared to those who did not participate in the training program. In addition, staff post-training indicated higher average levels of comfort with cultural competency indicators than those who did not participate.

Outcomes from the study can help to inform professionals about the role of training in promoting inclusive practices to improve the climate for both participants and employees. Allison and Hibbler (2004) argued, "If the recreation profession is to overcome and eradicate organizational barriers to inclusion, systematic research, and programmatic analyses must begin to elucidate issues and problems and suggest directions for future success" (p. 278). While more research is needed on the outcomes from diversity training, both within the aquatics setting and other leisure settings, results from this study provide an important step in evaluating the efficacy of diversity training for the promotion of LGBTQ inclusion in aquatic settings. Results support the potential for such trainings to influence attitudinal and practical changes and further suggest the need for future implementation and evaluation of training programs in an effort to present best practices towards creating organizations and employees that act as agents of social change (Cunningham, 2015b).

Endnote

¹The acronym LGBTQ is used throughout this article as the umbrella for minoritized genders and sexualities. The authors recognize that conflating these distinct categories into one grouping does not adequately reflect the diversity of experiences for L, G, B, T, and Q individuals. Indeed, the distinct experiences of queer genders and queer sexualities (both within and outside of aquatic spaces) are important. We further recognize those not included in this acronym (for example the intersex community). However, the diversity training analyzed here emphasized issues related to L, G, B, T, and Q populations; thus, this acronym is used.

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